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EDI Strategy

2023 - 2028

Working Together for Change

A strategy and action plan to build a genuinely representative and truly participative Students' Union at the University of Kent.

August 2023











Introduction



Zaid Mahmood
Students ' Union President 22- 24

As the Students' Union President 22-24, I am honoured to present the Kent Union EDI strategy 23-28!

Kent Union as an organisation values the diversity at the University of Kent and wants to become the leading Students' Union that creates inclusive and equitable spaces for all our students. We want to work towards breaking the barriers for the most disadvantaged and create an equitable playing field so that they thrive at Kent.

This strategy has been co-created with students and staff across the institution; we believe it is truly representative of everything we stand for as an organisation. I am truly proud of the dedication, support and enthusiasm of all our Kent Union staff in the formation of the EDI strategy!



Mel Sharman
Chief Executive

This new Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy is here to ensure equity and inclusion are a priority for Kent Union, I will ensure in my role as CEO that this important work is embedded across the organisation and into our overarching strategy.

I am very committed to EDI work within my role, but I do not consider myself an expert, every day I search for new insights to inform my thinking and to influence Kent Union's approach to EDI and encourage others to do the same.

The aim of this strategy is for Kent Union to lead the way and influence change across the Students' Union sector.



Olivia Adekunle

Director of Advocacy & Student Voice

Hello and welcome to our revised new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-28!

My name is Olivia, and I am the Director of Advocacy & Student Voice at Kent Union and also the strategic lead for implementing EDI within Kent Union. I am really proud of the work the entire staff team, Officers and Senior Leadership Team have put into moulding this work. We have been working Koreo to co-create our strategy and bring it to life. Koreo is a learning consultancy working across the public and non-profit sectors in UK society.

This strategy is the culmination of a strategic development process designed to foster greater understanding across KU of how to create a more inclusive and equitable students' union. Taking place over the last year, facilitated by Koreo, there has been an interactive discussion has led to the development of a strategic mission built around the themes of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and an action plan. This lays out a set of practical recommendations and areas for change, development and learning over the next five years.

Enjoy!





Angela Davis
Activist

"You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world.

And you have to do it ***all the time***."

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Part 1: Strategic Context & Framework



The world is **unjust, unfair** and our education system and movement is not isolated from it.

Strategic Context

The Big Picture

Whether it is racial injustice and racism, violence against women, bullying and harassment targeted at LGBTQIA+ people, systematic barriers placed in the way of those who are living with disabilities, rising Islamophobic and antisemitic attacks or discrimination based on people's age or other characteristics and life circumstances, the world around us is unfair, unjust, unequal and in desperate need of reimagining and rebuilding to create a truly equitable and inclusive society for everybody.

This is not the work of one or two individuals and groups, or a task where the responsibility of change falls on those facing oppression and prejudice to better 'fit in' - but instead the work of all of us to challenge and dismantle systemic barriers and practices which exclude so many people from the basic rights and experiences of living, working, studying and trying to get on all across the United Kingdom and beyond.

Our Education System

This reality and the urgent work to build a truly equitable world requires us to also recognise the deep challenges that are present in our own systems and spaces. Whilst it is often called 'the great leveller', and seen as an essential part of creating a better world, our education system too often entrenches and exacerbates privilege and reinforces cultural, economic and social power.

This is also the reality in the student movement - where students at the best funded, and often elite institutions, also get to benefit from the most resources. This system sees those with the most social capital and opportunities get further ahead - creating vast disparities across the sector and beyond and leaving others behind.



Recognition to Action

We have known about the realities and challenges of this context for an incredibly long time but the action needed to challenge and change it has often been slow and insufficient. The Awarding Gap and engagement gaps for working class, Racially & Ethnically Marginalised people, part-time and disabled students, sexual violence on campus, the scandal of rampant bullying and harassment, pay gaps and huge disparities in access and participation are a daily reality and a story that we have all got too comfortable with talking about. But it's now time to move from recognising this context to changing it and doing the hard work of creating a truly inclusive union.

Taking Responsibility

Whilst recognising the change we want to create, all too often in the student movement the work of building truly inclusive organisations, and an education system that is open to everyone and reflective of our own personal needs, is pushed onto others, and seen as the responsibility of those most marginalised themselves or framed as a political challenge, left to officers and separated from the day to day operations of the organisation.

Liberation and diversity campaigns, and manifesto commitments, are seen as the main areas of activity and drivers for creating inclusive unions. Whilst we often see ourselves as beacons of progressive and best practice, the reality is often very different on the ground and we must recognise our own failings and complicity. Taking responsibility - both personally and collectively - requires understanding this and challenging our own power and privilege. If we are to make real progress towards a truly equitable and inclusive movement and education system this consciousness and responsibility will be key to driving change.

Becoming Strategic Leaders

Most of all, we must be practical about creating a truly inclusive and equitable students' union. At its heart this is about being clear in our ambition to become strategic leaders, and understanding that for 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' to not just be an afterthought or a side show, it will require resourcing, immediate and sustained action, over the long term, and a deep commitment to threading this work through everything the union does.

Seeing this mission as part of everyone's work and an essential part of organisational culture and development, progress will require both challenge and support - with a clear plan to enable decisions to be made and action to happen. Building our own personal and collective literacy and skills as well as experimentation and innovation will be key enablers for us.



Figure 1: Koreo Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Matrix

Beliefs

Creating an environment where everyone can succeed and thrive.

We believe in ensuring education is a truly transformative experience for everyone

• Education has the power to change everything. We believe in harnessing its power to enable people to pursue their dreams and contribute to building a better society. Creating knowledge, building confidence, breaking down barriers and driving innovation, experimentation and discovery, education challenges us and enriches our society and builds our capacities as citizens.

• Education must therefore be accessible and truly inclusive to ensure that the power and privileges it creates are fairly distributed. This means constantly working to make education - and the university experience - a place where everyone can succeed and thrive.

• Ensuring education is truly inclusive will mean ongoing sustained learning and action, with each of us taking personal responsibility for making this happen and being dedicated to doing the hard work through everything we do.

We believe in building an environment where everyone is able to be their true selves

• Each of us is unique and the differences we bring enrich the world and the work we all do. We know that every person comes to Kent with their own backstory, experiences, stories and challenges. Through our own work we recognise this individuality and embrace the things that make each of us different. We respect and celebrate this diversity proudly and know it makes us all stronger.

• We believe in actively fostering an environment and community where this diversity is valued and can thrive; ensuring that no one has to hide, mask or change the things that make them unique and enabling them to be their true and full selves.

• To do this we recognise equality - where we ensure people are not discriminated against because of their characteristics - and equity - where we actively ensure equality of opportunity for all and work to build an experience that is bespoke to the needs of each of us as individuals and help tear down barriers. Such an environment builds a culture of belonging and enables each of us to contribute towards our shared mission.

We believe in being conscious, active and always agitating for change

• Most importantly we believe this work requires an ongoing commitment to being conscious, active and always striving to improve - both individually and collectively.



Behaviours

To enable us to do this work, and live up to our beliefs, we will embed a set of behaviours related to our pursuit of a fairer, more equitable students' union for everyone.

We work with :

Consciousness

Of our mission and understanding of our own power and privilege and how this affects and plays a part in the work we do.

Curiousness

Always seeking to understand, learn more and look for new ways to deliver our mission. We will be innovative and experimental.

Connection

Ensuring we are deeply rooted in the communities we seek to serve and represent, and see ourselves in. We will influence the systems we are part of to foster better connections.

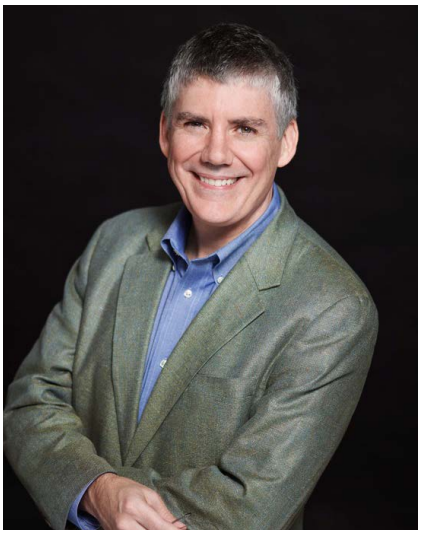
Challenge

By bringing fresh perspectives to ourselves and others, whilst always seeking to do better and to recognise all views and perspectives.

Change

Where we are driven by making a real difference - not just for people, but collaboratively with them. Being an example of the change we want to see in the world.





Rick Riordan
Author

"Fairness does not mean everyone gets the same.

Fairness means everyone gets what they ***need***."

Mission

Become a truly equitable and inclusive students' union that is a) genuinely **representative** of, and which b) drives open, collaborative **participation** across the whole student body.

Impact

We believe that this mission will lead us to creating a students' union which at its heart operates with a culture of equitable inclusion - and where staff, students and stakeholders have the necessary understanding, responsibility and literacy to create an environment where everyone can succeed and thrive.

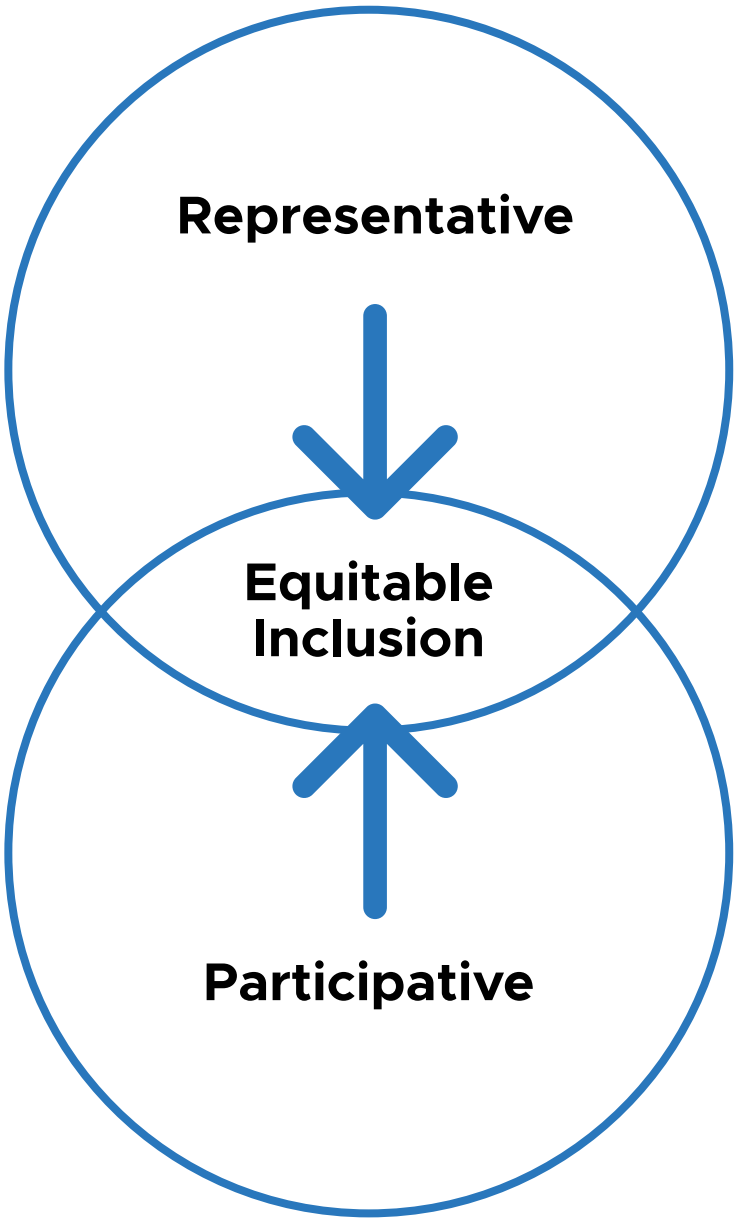


Figure 2: Key strategic strands

Themes

In conducting a review process and making strategic recommendations, our goal is to ensure that the proposed actions are practical and can be easily integrated and embedded within the operations of KU. We understand the importance of creating sustainable change and believe that this can only be achieved by making practical suggestions that can be implemented with ease. Our aim is to support the union in achieving its Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) goals by providing actionable recommendations that can be integrated into their daily operations and work culture. By doing so, we hope to ensure that the positive impact of our suggestions will be long-lasting and beneficial to the entire student community at the University of Kent.

This strategy is therefore operationalised through 6 key strategic themes and areas for action, each with their own key objectives, which feed from our ambitions:

1. Understanding and knowledge

A clear definition, understanding of EDI and EDI issues including power and privilege.

2. Data, evidence and insight

There is data driven evidence, and reporting of both representation and participation.

3. Culture, values and performance

There is a defined and managed organisational culture, values and expectations.

4. Accountability and responsibility

Organisational structures and key areas of responsibility are defined and evaluated

5. Skills and practices

There are sustained recruitment, training and practice development opportunities.

6. Building equitable Union Services

There are transformative services developed that meet the needs of all students at Kent.



Strategic Themes & Objectives

These themes are then supported and grouped by enabling areas of delivery.

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1. Understanding and knowledge

This theme was identified within the conversations. Whilst there was a willingness to engage on the themes of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, people were unable to articulate clearly what EDI is and how it manifests within the union. This theme also supports action with the issues of knowledge inequity and literacy at a personal and collective level of power and privilege and ensures that there is a clear mission and theory of change driving the work.

1.1	Specific research and action plans across each protected characteristic of the Equalities Act 2010 are developed over time, put in-place, worked on and resourced through the organisation to ensure legal compliance and best practice
1.2	An open library of EDI sources and resources, including definitions and terminology related to the legal framework of equality is easy to access for all staff and volunteers and allows them to contribute their own views, challenges and reflections (for example through the use of an intranet or HR system)
1.3	Suitable and challenging accreditations and/or kitemarks are identified and signed up to so that the organisation is visibly signalling its commitment to EDI (for example, Investors in People, Race Equality Charter, Stonewall Diversity Champions, Living Wage Employer status, Mindful Employer, Mental Health First Aid, Disability Confident, Workplace Wellbeing Charter, Athena Swan Gender Charter, Halo Code)
1.4	Staff induction and personal development agenda is reviewed to build consistent standards of and incorporate a standard baseline understanding of EDI and EDI issues for all staff and confidence is regularly monitored through a staff survey
1.5	There is an ongoing training and development offer which supports staff to identify and build skills and knowledge that challenges discriminatory behaviour and practices
1.6	The union secures resources to develop research related to engagement and participation of those from low socioeconomic backgrounds (including class) and wider life experiences that may disadvantage or affect a students' award and success beyond those listed within the Equality Act
1.7	The union expands its understanding and creates themed action plans, based on the research conducted in 1.6, beyond legislative definitions included in 1.2

2. Data Evidence & Insight

Data driven evidence, and reporting of both representation & participation. This theme responds to the consistent challenge with data and evidence on EDI issues; it lays out an action plan to build organisational capacity and insight through the regular monitoring and collection of data. This is one of the key themes that enables many of the indicators across other areas to be effectively monitored and sits at the heart of ensuring equality, diversity and inclusivity throughout the organisation.

2.1	**Data framework (with necessary categories, qualitative and quantitative) is developed, negotiated, agreed and built in collaboration with the university. This will set out data requirements and practices across the organisation that include a renegotiation of the union and university's data sharing agreement that aims to guarantee the union's access to necessary demographic and inclusion data**
2.2	**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data tracked and monitored across organisational policies and processes, in an equitable and GDPR compliant way. This will ensure services are using equality data to inform key decisions, policies and service delivery - all policies and processes are reviewed with an equitable lens whilst ensuring the organisation remains GDPR compliant**
2.3	**Utilise statistics and information from credible and reliable sources. That sets out the demographic and diverse makeup of relevant geographic regions and communities. This will help to benchmark activities and services whilst avoiding stereotyping**
2.4	**Engagement activity data is collected and analysed to ensure organisational learning**
2.5	**Sustained evidence base is developed into student issues, needs and views across all divisions**
2.6	**Training and development undertaken related to best practice in managing and conducting sensitive data**
2.7	**Employees, applicants, volunteers and students feel comfortable and safe sharing their demographic or protected characteristics information.**



3. Culture, Values & Performance

Defined and managed organisational culture, values & expectations

Building on the union's generally open and welcoming culture, this theme lays out a set of activities in building and cultivating a culture of responsibility related to EDI issues,shared values, mission and approach to leadership. This is about building a consistent approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion which threads through everything and lays the groundwork for the remaining themes.

3.1	**A behaviour framework is developed that drives the mission and builds a culture that removes divisions, tensions and cliques**
3.2	**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion statements, behaviours and beliefs are written, reviewed and shared throughout the union's communications, channels and website with staff and students**
3.3	**The staff team is monitored annually and asked for their opinions on building a more inclusive organisation with 100% people stating they belong at the organisation**
3.4	**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is built into our strategic, department, team and individual planning and workflows and regularly reviewed**
3.5	**There is a consistent and ongoing approach to creating spaces and experiences that enable staff to appreciate, develop and share cultural diversity and understand other cultures and backgrounds**
3.6	**Staff are proactively informed about reasonable adjustments available to them through a full induction process and ongoing 1-2-1 and appraisal system**
3.7	**Personal development and EDI action plans and skills assessments are carried out annually with a regular report and recommendations reviewed at the EDI Steering Group**



4. Accountability & Responsibility

Organisational structures and key areas of responsibility defined and evaluated

The key strategic activities will only be truly powerful if there is a sustained culture of accountability and responsibility - from the top to the bottom of the organisation, including throughout student and staff communities.

4.1	Effectiveness of activities and commitments to EDI and EDI issues are routinely discussed at board/governance level
4.2	All organisational EDI policies drafted, in place and monitored annually to ensure best practice
4.3	The Leadership team are role models and lead a collaborative approach and responsibility on EDI issues
4.4	A review of existing anti-racist and anti-discrimination policies will be undertaken and practices developed (including the training it provides to members and staff) to embed this work throughout the organisation
4.5	Annual statement of compliance/ provision of practice with this strategy is developed and signed-off by the Board and made publicly available
4.6	Appropriate and required budgets and funding are made available to achieve EDI objectives as stated in the strategy
4.7	Inclusion of diverse representatives on working groups, boards, and at each level of organisation through a culture of co-creation and peer review
4.8	An EDI steering group regularly reviews the progress of this strategy and is made up of senior leaders, staff, students and university/sector/ community representatives
4.9	Create Equality, Diversity and Inclusion ambassadors or champions in each staffing and team department to ensure standards
4.10	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion reviews and audits are undertaken and used to inform when, where and how we hold activities in both a digital and physical context across the whole union
4.11	Targeted mystery shopper scheme is developed and undertaken to review services
4.12	There is a defined informal and formal complaints process for all protected characteristics

5. Skills & Practices

Sustained recruitment, training and practice development opportunities

This theme supports the union to embed skills for EDI practice across the organisation and support staff through practical resources around recruitment, personal development and training.

5.1	Staff teams have the tools, resources and capabilities to proactively foster an inclusive environment at work. They will support diverse, open and engaging experiences and services within the Union
5.2	Recruitment processes are regularly reviewed to ensure an unbiased recruitment process where all staff involved understand and act on their responsibility
5.3	The ability of applicants to work inclusively is considered in recruitment through embedding behaviours and values into role profiles and job descriptions
5.4	Diversity is considered as part of all business planning and informs our staffing structure when considered by the Board and Senior Leadership
5.5	Training and knowledge development will be implemented for students and student leaders / volunteers to identify and challenge bias and discrimination within their own communities/groups. Activities are embedded into induction and training for all leaders
5.6	Employment policies support individual needs and are annually reviewed for best practice
5.7	Paid internships, apprenticeships, volunteering or work placements are created within the union to drive diversity and support objectives throughout the organisation
5.8	In-work and volunteer mentoring, coaching and networking schemes are available and widely offered throughout the organisation - particularly targeting those from underrepresented groups
5.9	Consistent and standard practice in relation to trigger warnings and content warnings is developed across the organisation to drive accessibility
5.10	Welcome back and the union calendar is redeveloped and regularly reviewed to embed EDI within its principles and the delivery of events
5.11	The union develops an inclusive communications policy and framework which ensures its brand is fully accessible and open to all

5.12	Communications materials and channels (e.g. website, photographs, brochures) feature people and voices from a wide range of backgrounds that are representative and inclusive of the student body
5.13	Students' union staff and volunteers complete Race Equity Training

6. Building Equitable Union Services

Sustained recruitment, training and practice development opportunities. Building transformative services that meet the needs of all students at Kent.

6.1	The organisation regularly reviews it student membership and the commercial services it provides against internal (e.g. historic data) and external (e.g. other unions) benchmarks
6.2	Staff team have the tools, data, resources and capabilities to understand the student body makeup, higher education and the wider student experiences through multiple measures such as demographics, mode of study, course and year level
6.3	Members are able to feedback on the all services and provisions across the unions
6.4	Members feedback is used and evidenced in all planning of services, activities and projects
6.5	Members are able to be involved in the design and delivery of work
6.6	The union designs specific programmes, services and activities for members where there are low levels of participation and engagement
6.7	The union staff and students leaders are regularly connecting and talking to students and members about the work of the union and their experiences within the institution and the union



Enablers

With the key elements of this strategy being held consistently across the students' union, we understand that they will need to have clear application to the current operating structures and delivery within the students' union. As such, each of these indicators has been mapped to ensure that the strategy is deeply embedded in the work of the union and all its staff and activities.

To do this we have identified and grouped activities into three key areas of focus

Governance and Compliance

Which incorporates all indicators relevant to the Board, University partnership, complaints and oversight, organisational design and strategy.

Staffing and Resources

Which incorporates career and student staff, recruitment and retention, training and development, data and reporting, management, officer support, finance and space and organisational policies

Engagement and Delivery

Which encompasses all student facing activities and opportunities, representation and advice, communications and brand and commercial services.



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Part 2:
Action Plan



Action Plan

To support Kent Union in achieving its EDI goals, we have developed a comprehensive action plan that lays out the key indicators and themes across each enabling area of focus over a 5-year period. This action plan has been carefully crafted to provide a clear and concise roadmap for the union to follow in order to make meaningful progress in the area of EDI. The plan is tabulated to provide a clear and easily accessible overview of the key actions that need to be taken, along with associated timelines and resources required.

This plan can be used as a tool for the union to track its progress towards its EDI goals, measure its impact, and make informed decisions about how best to allocate resources and focus its efforts. We believe that this action plan will provide a solid foundation for the union to build upon as it works to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for all students at Kent University.









EDI Strategy Overall Goals

Led by the EDI Steering Group.

KPI	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
The students' union is considered an equitable and inclusive organisation	70% say the students' union is an equitable and inclusive organisation	75% say the students' union is an equitable and inclusive organisation	80% say the students' union is an equitable and inclusive organisation	90% say the students' union is an equitable and inclusive organisation	100% say the students' union is an equitable and inclusive organisation
Effective organisational EDI strategy developed, in place, monitored and reviewed	EDI strategy developed, finalised and signed-off with clear 5 year action and resourcing plan in place	EDI strategy is fully embedded across the organisation's operations and reporting progress across all departments and key areas of development	EDI strategy is reviewed and evaluated based on initial 2 year results with at least 80% of staff, trustees and officers agreeing the strategy is as an effective driver of inclusion at the organisation	80% of EDI strategic aims and objectives have been met with 90% of staff, trustees and officers agreeing that the strategy is as an effective driver of inclusion	EDI strategy is reviewed and new 5 year objectives and action plan agreed and in place with 100% of staff, trustees and officers agreeing that the strategy has been an effective driver of inclusion
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is a strategic priority and is referenced, included and embedded within the organisation's wider strategy and mission	-	EDI is defined as an organisational objective and priority through EDI Strategy	Organisational strategy is reviewed for effectiveness of promoting inclusion	80% staff identify Equality, Diversity and Inclusions as a strategic priority	90% staff identify Equality, Diversity and Inclusions as a strategic priority

The Action Plan can be accessed **here.**

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Part 3:
Appendix



Strong Students' Unions Framework

Alongside embedding the strategic themes and delivery models, we utilise an approach to developing 'strong students' unions'. This helps ensure the union's key fundamentals are strengthened and regularly reviewed and that the enabling environment empowers the EDI strategic indicators.

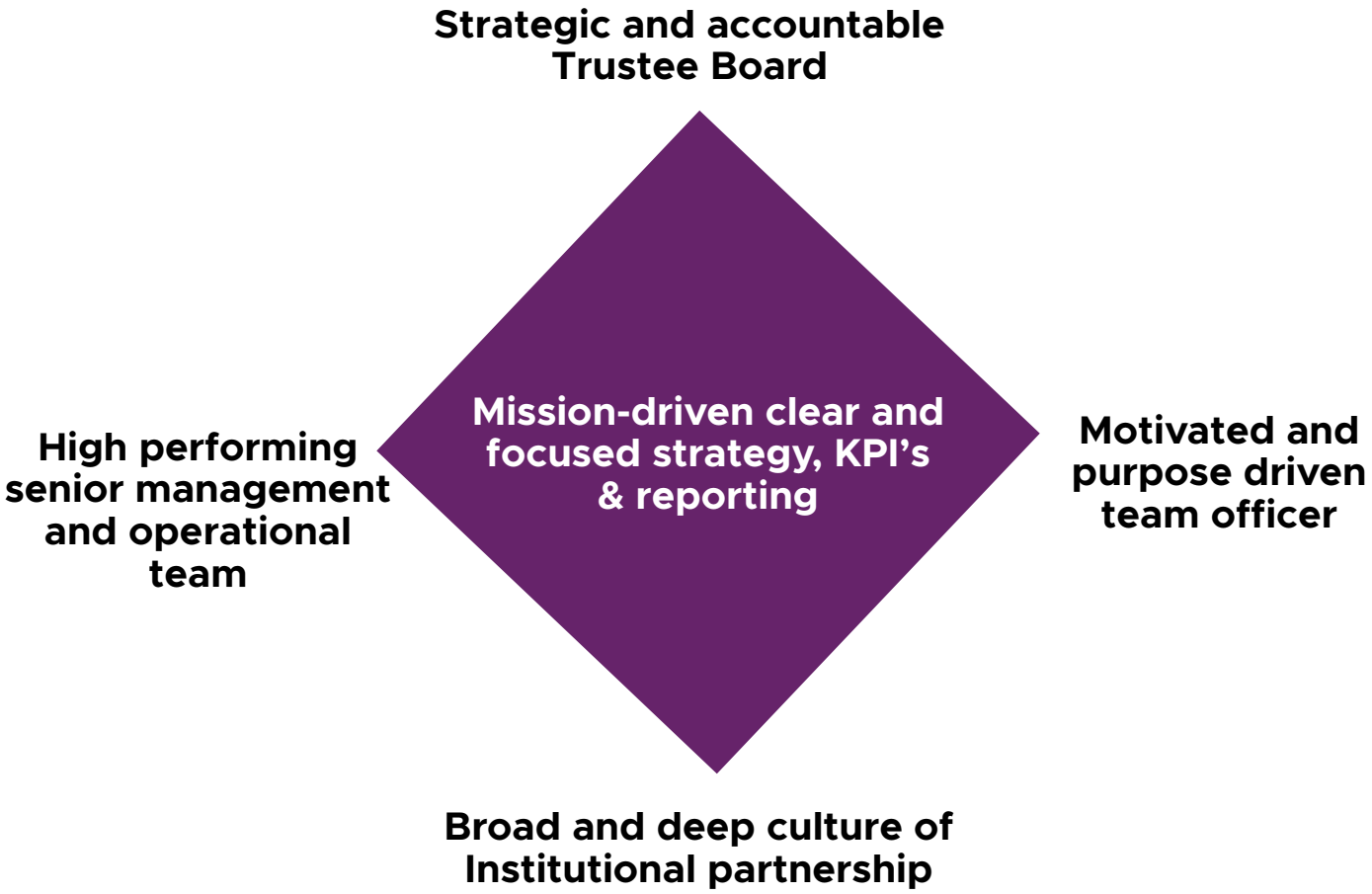


Figure 3: Koreo Strong Students' Unions: Key factors of a strong, strategic students' union

Risk Framework

Compliance		
Strategic planning	Governance & risk	Financial

Participation		
Democracy	Engagement	Satisfaction

Capability		
Communication	People	Partnership

Figure 4: Key elements of a strong students' union risk framework



Risk Framework

Compliance	**Strategic planning**	Is the purpose of the union clear, well articulated and measurable?	Mission-driven, clear and focused strategy, KPIs and reporting is in place An annual report and plan is developed and published which evaluates impact and places intended activities, and officer manifestos, in context of strategy
	Governance and risk	Is the union properly structured and have risks been identified and limited?	Trustee board is strategic and accountable A detailed and regularly updated and reviewed risk register is in place
	Financial	Is the union financially secure and does its model offer resilience as well as flexibility and the level of resource required?	A yearly budget, financial accounts and statement of financial performance and compliance is delivered, evaluated and approved The students' union has an income and block grant strategy The students' union has a sustainable mix and blend of income and is not overly reliant or dependent on one form of income

Participation	**Democracy**	Is the union's democracy truly inclusive and driving accountable, good policy and decisions across the organisation?	The students' union has a student participation plan There is evidence of student, demand, design and delivery on all key aspects of the students' union offer The students' union meets its requirements and duties regarding independent cross-campus elections
	Engagement	Is the member's engagement with the union tracked, benchmarked and appropriate level?	The students' union has a student engagement plan Overall % of students engaging in union Diversity (including course-based, demographic and other themes) are monitored and reported
	Satisfaction	Is the union providing satisfactory experiences and interventions for its members and is this benchmarked enabling the union to judge its reputation and impact?	Overall % of students satisfied with union (Q26)

Capability	**Communication**	Is the union communicating to and understanding its members sufficiently?	The students' union has access and procedures to develop necessary and required insight and data. The students' union has a brand and communications strategy and regularly reviews its performance. The students' union monitors and reports on its communications channels and engagement
	People	Is the union able to draw on experienced and energetic staff that operate as high performing teams and exhibit the behaviours required and expected?	The students' union has a people, culture and equality, diversity and inclusion strategy. The students' union has a high performing senior management & operational team. The students' union has a motivated and purpose driven officer team. The students' union tracks and evaluates the strategic relationships and influence its staff, officers, volunteers and networks hold within the university and beyond. The students' union evidences a learning culture and environment
	Partnership	Is the union able to utilise a successful partnership with its institution(s) and the wider community for the benefit of shared mission and purpose and benefit of its members?	The student's union evidences a broad and deep culture of institutional partnership The students' union evidences engagement with the university. The students' union evidences partnership with the wider community/ relevant stakeholders

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Thanks.

For more information please contact

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