

STRATEGIC PLAN

2025-28





FRESHERS' FAIR

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SHAPING OUR PLAN

The strategic plan has been informed by widespread research and consultation completed during June, July and August 2025, which included:

- The 'Five Big Questions' survey, completed by **1,027 students (UG 58%, PG 42%)**
- In-depth interviews with university colleagues
- In-depth interviews with the **President (UG) 2023/24** and **Presidents 2024/25**
- Interviews and email feedback from JCR and MCR representatives
- Focus groups with staff to discuss organisational values and strategic themes
- Strategy sessions with the **Trustee Board**
- Presentation of research findings via working groups with staff, managers and the **2025/26 Sabbatical Team**
- Engagement with other collegiate university Students' Unions to understand how they work with college student organisations
- Session with **Senior Management Team** to refine the emerging strategic themes and enablers
- **Trustee Board away day** to review the first draft strategy
- Desktop research, including reviewing a cross-section of strategies from other charities in the UK and students' unions from **six countries**

The emerging priorities and themes from the research and consultation are the importance of:

- Clarifying and rebuilding relationships with **JCRs and MCRs**
- Providing training, support, and resources for student leaders in all representative structures
- Strengthening the **Academic Rep system**
- Developing the SU's central role in running student societies
- Understanding the differences between UG and PG student needs and addressing these clearly and separately
 - Clarifying the SU's role in outreach and widening participation
 - Improving staff and volunteer support
 - Focusing on the SU's work on inclusion and diversity in a more strategic manner
 - Building insight, and research capability and capacity



INTRODUCTION FROM OUR OFFICERS

We are delighted to launch our new vision, mission and values, and new strategic plan for the period 2025-2028.

We want to see Cambridge SU fulfil its potential to be a thriving students' union that effectively represents and supports Cambridge students and works collaboratively with the many wider student organisations in Cambridge. We also want to ensure that Cambridge SU continues its proud history of campaigning for social justice and supporting student activists. This new strategic plan details how we intend to fulfil these ambitions and priorities.

Our new values, **Students-First, Inclusion and Collaboration**, reflect the type of organisation we want to be, the culture we want to create, and the way we want to work. Students will always be central to our organisation, and we also want them directing our work through effective democratic structures. We want to build on our inclusion and diversity work to ensure we are leading the creation of a world in which everyone is seen and able to succeed.

Lastly, we believe in the power of collective action and will strive to work with other student communities to deliver change for our members. We are excited about the journey we are embarking upon and the direction our organisation is headed.



OUR PURPOSE, VISION, MISSION, & VALUES



OUR PURPOSE

We are:

- A charity that supports students to thrive at Cambridge
- A democratic membership organisation run for, with, and by our members
- A campaigning organisation, fighting for social justice

OUR VISION

Cambridge students feel effectively represented and supported by a thriving Students' Union and collective of wider student organisations.

OUR MISSION

- Represent all students at Cambridge
- Provide expert advice and assistance
- Support student groups
- Campaign for social justice

OUR VALUES

Students-First

We believe in representative democracy; we are led by, work for, and accountable to our members, who direct our work through democratic structures.

Inclusion

We believe in a world where everyone is seen and able to succeed; we strive to create a diverse and inclusive environment and to support those in need.

Collaboration

We believe in the power of collective action; we strive to create student communities and work with others to deliver change for our members.

WHO WE ARE

27,000 MEMBERS

12,910

UNDERGRADUATE
MEMBERS

12,010

POSTGRADUATE
MEMBERS

2100

MEMBERS ON
OTHER COURSES

525+

STUDENT GROUPS

100+

ACADEMIC
REPRESENTATIVES

20+ STAFF

5 STUDENT
OFFICERS

1000'S

STUDENT
VOLUNTEERS

WHAT WE DO

Annual
STUDENTS' AWARDS

One of the biggest
FRESHERS' FAIRS
in the UK

Support
57 JCR'S & MCR'S

52 SHADOWING SCHEME MENTORS

36,000 VIEWS
on our Advice & Guidance page
on our website

Advice & Support for
500+ STUDENTS
each year

FREE
sexual health supplies, advice & information

**CAMPAIGNS, EVENTS, TRAINING, AWARDS,
EXAM SUPPORT, INFORMATION, GUIDANCE,
PRACTICAL SUPPORT & MORE**

FRESHERS' FAIR



OUR STRATEGY ON A PAGE

VISION

Cambridge students feel effectively represented and supported by a thriving Students' Union and collective of wider student organisations.

MISSION

- Represent all students at Cambridge
- Provide expert advice and assistance
- Support student groups
- Campaign for social justice

VALUES

Students-first



Collaboration



Inclusion



STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

The Voice of Students

Help Students in Need

Build Inclusive Communities

Campaign for Social Justice

STRATEGIC ENABLERS

- ▶ Our People
- ▶ Governance
- ▶ Effective Communication
- ▶ IT & Digital Technologies
- ▶ Suitable Space



OUR STRATEGIC AMBITIONS

THE VOICE OF STUDENTS



HELP STUDENTS THRIVE



BUILD INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES



CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE



THE VOICE OF STUDENTS

Well-informed through our democratic structures, we work together with our 100+ Academic Reps and 55+ JCRs & MCRs to represent all Cambridge students.

Cambridge's demanding academic environment and 31 diverse colleges make representation challenging. Our role is to collaborate with and support student representatives at Cambridge to create a powerful student voice.



KEY PROJECTS

- ▶ Develop our use of data and insight to inform representative work, drawing on market research, social policy reporting and feedback from committees.
- ▶ Review which University committees we are represented on, ensuring we are in the right places to represent students.
- ▶ Develop the Academic Rep system, improving support for reps and working with them to agree annual priorities for postgraduate and undergraduate students.
- ▶ Collaborate with other collegiate university and Russell Group students' unions, providing an opportunity to learn from others and engage in wider campaigns.
- ▶ Work with JCRs and MCRs to co-ordinate student representative work, offering practical support and continuing to deliver the College Engagement Plan.

ASKS OF THE UNIVERSITY

- ▶ Provide institutional backing for our elections, working with us to promote elections and encourage students to participate.
- ▶ Support us in developing our Academic Rep system and raising awareness amongst students of who their representative is.
- ▶ Help us be as effective as possible in our role as representatives on University committees, with enhanced support, guidance and training.

HELP STUDENTS THRIVE

Every student is supported by our student safety net, through our Advice Service, lobbying and campaigning work, and practical support for students.

Many students struggle with financial hardship, mental health, academic or institutional issues, and wider life challenges. Our role is to support students, help them progress through their studies and have the best time at university.



KEY PROJECTS

- ▶ Complete a review of our Advice Service and its position within the wider University and College provision of advice, welfare and guidance.
- ▶ Review the Shadowing Scheme and consider how we fit in the University access ecosystem, and support participation from under-represented cohorts of students.
- ▶ Consolidate SUpermarket and develop a package of support for students struggling with the cost of living.
- ▶ Continue our Exam Support programme, broadening the scheme to cover exam de-stress and practical support to help students thrive during exams.
- ▶ Consider opportunities to collaborate with student welfare and guidance groups, such as Cambridge Nightline and Cambridge University Student Minds.

ASKS OF THE UNIVERSITY

- ▶ Promote access to our Advice Service for students involved in any formal University process, ensuring all staff, particularly in Colleges, refer into the service.
- ▶ Work collaboratively with us to tackle disparities between the Colleges and the experience of students.
- ▶ Collaborate with our Sabbatical Officers to make Cambridge more inclusive and to improve mental health and wellbeing support.

BUILD INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Every student belongs and feels part of the University. Societies are thriving and play a central role to life at Cambridge.

We play a key role in supporting student societies and will strengthen our support for societies, JCRs, and MCRs to enable them to facilitate inclusive student communities and experiences.



KEY PROJECTS

- ▶ Deliver a world-class Freshers' Fair as a central part of Freshers' Week and widen our programme of Freshers' events to build inclusive communities of students.
- ▶ Consider opportunities to extend events and activities past Freshers' Week to help new students settle into university life and integrate into student communities.
- ▶ Work with the University on the Societies Project and play a more central role to societies, supporting them to run activities safely, legally and inclusively.
- ▶ Research options to set up a Societies' Varsity and encourage greater society collaboration with other universities.
- ▶ Provide a programme of practical support, resources and training for JCRs and MCRs to support them to build student communities in colleges.

ASKS OF THE UNIVERSITY

- ▶ Provide institutional backing for our more central role in running student groups at Cambridge.
- ▶ Provide practical help to facilitate student engagement in activities and support our campaign to introduce compulsory lecture capture.
- ▶ Provide practical pre-arrival support to introduce new students to the SU.

CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Every student is supported to make a stand on issues they care about; we encourage students to challenge inequality and campaign for social justice.

Students' unions and student movements have long driven awareness of climate change, discrimination, and other social justice issues. Students expect their SU to take meaningful action on these urgent challenges. We will continue our work to promote equity, diversity and inclusion, working with the University.



KEY PROJECTS

- ▶ Create and facilitate activists, providing practical support for those wanting to campaign on issues they are passionate about.
- ▶ Continue our work to promote equity, diversity and inclusion, launching and implementing our new EDI Strategy.
- ▶ Run an annual programme of cultural awareness events in collaboration with student groups, celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion.
- ▶ Continue our campaigning work around environmental sustainability and ethical practice, including lobbying the University to commit to an ethical finance policy.
- ▶ Engage with the community to demonstrate the value students bring to the area and encourage students to participate in local representation and democracy.

ASKS OF THE UNIVERSITY:

- ▶ Work with us to improve the ethical credentials of the University.
- ▶ Work collaboratively with us to deliver our new EDI Strategy and create a truly diverse and inclusive culture at the University.

OUR STRATEGIC ENABLERS

Achieving our vision and ambitions relies on firm foundations and adequate resourcing. Key areas of focus are: **Strong Governance, Improved Communications, Strengthened Human Resourcing, Improved Use of Information and Digital Technologies, and Developed Plans for Space Requirements.**

These strategic 'enablers' support delivery of our wider objectives.



GOVERNANCE



EFFECTIVE COMMS



PEOPLE & CULTURE



IT & TECH



OUR SPACE

GOVERNANCE

A transparent, accountable charity, well-resourced and robustly governed, with effective democratic structures that engage members and hold us to account.

Students' Unions have unusual governance structures, bringing opportunities to put members at the forefront of how the organisation is led, but also risks through high trustee turnover and limited depth of skills and experience. As a Students' Union and campaigning organisation, and part of the University of Cambridge, we are under particular external scrutiny. Robust governance, transparency, and accountability are key to our future success. We will strengthen our financial management and generate more disposable income to support the delivery of our strategy.

KEY PROJECTS

- ▶ Complete actions in the Governance Plan 2025-26, including introducing external committee members, an annual Board Effectiveness review, and chair appraisals.
- ▶ Increase staff resource by growing income and carefully controlling expenditure.
- ▶ Complete and implement the review of Officer Scrutiny Panels, and review our Articles of Association and By-laws.
- ▶ Map compliance against the Charity Code of Governance, identifying gaps and confirming a development plan for completion by the end of 2027.
- ▶ Complete a full external governance review by the end of the strategic plan.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Impactful communication that enhances our visibility, grows engagement, and builds meaningful relationships with our members.

Effective communication is central to achieving our mission. To ensure our messaging resonates with students, we will work to understand their preferences and expectations. This will enable us to communicate in ways that are relevant, inclusive, and representative of the diverse student voice.

KEY PROJECTS

- Develop a strategic communications framework, informed by stakeholder mapping, to guide all communications activity.
- Implement a market insight programme to capture student opinion and identify priority areas for us to focus our work on.
- Empower student voices by recruiting a team of student content creators to increase authentic, user-generated content across SU channels.
- Strengthen external partnerships to raise the profile of the SU regionally and nationally, amplifying our impact and influence.

OUR PEOPLE

Talented people, working together to deliver for our members in an inclusive, high-performing culture.

We rely on our staff, student volunteers, trustees and Sabbatical Officers to run our organisation. We will ensure a co-ordinated approach to managing our full 'workforce' (staff, officers, and volunteers), and maximise the potential of our human resources.

KEY PROJECTS

- Complete implementation of People Plan 2025-26, and develop and deliver a new People Plan for 2026-28, which covers the full 'workforce'.
- Develop and deliver an EDI Strategy for 2026-28 which covers all our people, including our members. Improve our support, training, reward and recognition for volunteers and achieve Investing in Volunteers accreditation by the end of 2027.
- Review how the Trustee Board oversees the complete 'workforce', including introducing a full set of people metrics covering all our people.

IT & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Utilising information and digital technologies to support delivery of our strategy, engage our members, and maximise our resources.

The SU utilises external IT support and does not (unlike most Students' Unions) buy into the University's IT support. Effective use of IT and Digital Technologies is vital to maximise our resources, engage our members, and improve data management and insight capture.

KEY PROJECTS

- Review opportunities presented by AI and how to manage the use of AI, by the end of 2026.
- Develop an IT and Digital Technology Plan for 2026-28, covering IT hardware, IT software options, IT skills and learning, and IT governance.
- Complete a full review of the SU's business systems by the end of 2027.
- Conduct an audit of our requirements for data and insight management and identify solutions to meet our needs.

OUR SPACE

Securing physical space befitting of a world-class students' union that plays a central role at a top 10 global university.

The SU currently has space on the top floor of the University Centre, including a student lounge, open-plan office and meeting rooms. The SU pays no rent or utilities for the space, but has no formal lease or security of tenure. To realise our ambition, play a central role in the student experience, and support the University in delivering a world-class student experience, we need suitable and appropriate space.

KEY PROJECTS

- Confirm a short-to-medium term plan to house the SU and confirm a lease and security of tenure for the confirmed provision.
- Research students' union building provision across the top 50 universities globally, identifying best practice examples.
- Work with the University to develop a long-term plan to provide a world-class building for the SU.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

To assist our members, the University, our Trustee Board and management to monitor progress against our strategy and overall performance, we have developed a set of performance indicators covering membership engagement and satisfaction, staff engagement, University engagement and our financial health:

NSS QUESTION 25 RESULT

How well does the Students' Union represent students academic interests?

Achieve 60% agreement in 2028
NSS (c.f. 52.5% in 2025).

STAFF ENGAGEMENT SURVEY QUESTION 67

I would recommend this organisation as a good place to work.

Result increases to >70% by 2028
(c.f. 39% in 2025).

ELECTIONS TURNOUT

Increase voter turnout in the main SU elections to >25% by 2028
(c.f. 18% in 2025).

STAFF TURNOVER

Reduce level to <20% in the 12 months to July 2028 (c.f. >30% in 2025).

UNIVERSITY COMMITMENT TO AN SU BUILDING

Secure commitment from the University for a long-term plan to provide a world-class building for the SU.

LEVEL OF FREE RESERVES

Achieve mid-point of Reserves Policy by 2028 (free reserves of £335K, +/- £15K, c.f. £260K in 2025).

THANK YOU

We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed to the creation of this strategy. It has been shaped by the insight, expertise, and collaboration of many colleagues and partners across the collegiate University, whose support and input have been invaluable.



FOCUSSED ON YOU



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