

Newcastle University/Newcastle University Students' Union Relationship Agreement 2023-24

Introduction

This relationship agreement aims to provide a clear and concise reference for both the University and the Students' Union and outlines the basis for the relationship between the two parties and the principles under which they both shall operate.

Background

The 1994 Education Act placed a legal requirement on the University governing body to ensure that the Students' Union operates in a fair and democratic manner. In 2006, a new Charities Act was introduced which altered the regulatory framework in which charities operate. The changes included the removal from law of students' unions as exempt charities; students' unions across the country were therefore required to review and revise their governance arrangements. As a result, Newcastle University Students' Union restructured its governance arrangements, registered as a Company Limited by guarantee in August 2009 and became a fully registered charity in September 2010. Although, the Charity Commission and Companies House became primary regulators, the requirements of the 1994 Education remained extant.

In March 2011 the Committee of University Chairs and the National Union of Students, worked collaboratively to produce outline guidance and best practice for governing bodies working with students' unions. Following a two year project researching relationships between students' unions and higher education institutions eight key principles were identified that seemed to underpin excellent working relationships. To enable effective and positive partnership working, Newcastle University and Newcastle University Students' Union, are committed to these principles.

Principles

Newcastle University and Newcastle University Students' Union both agree to adopt the following principles as the basis of their working, and ongoing relationship:

Strategic Partnership. Spirit of partnership between HEI and SU informing the strategic direction of both parties and informing service agreements. Informed engagement of SU representatives in key institutional decision-making bodies.

Student Centred. Shared commitment to developing and improving students' experience of academic and extra-curricular aspects of their lives.

Respect and Understanding. Clarity about, and mutual understanding of, the distinct roles of the HEI and the SU and the value that each party brings to the relationship.

Openness and Trust. Full, open, regular communication on relevant issues, in particular issues likely to have an impact on the other party, the student population and/or other joint stakeholders.

Mutual Support and Commitment. Constructive Interactions. Demonstrable commitment to making the relationship work through investment of time and resources.

Independence. Recognition of the value of a strong, student-led students' union empowered to determine and manage its own affairs. Recognition of the need for the HEI to balance the interests of a range of stakeholders within an increasingly challenging external context.

Accountability. Accountability of SU to HEI as supervisor (under the 1994 Education Act) and principal funder, within a mutually agreed framework which is robust, effective, efficient and compatible with the reporting requirements of other regulators, such as the Charity Commission, and Companies House. Acknowledgement by HEI that the SU is a major stakeholder and primary body representing the student voice.

Diversity & Equality. A shared commitment to equality and diversity and the fair treatment of all staff and students.

Working Relationship

Whilst the principles outlined above will apply to all interaction between the parties, they will be particularly important in relation to the two key formal meetings held between the parties.

The principal meeting is the Partnership Committee Meeting, which as well as allowing dialogue at a strategic level also provides the mechanism for the University to fulfil its responsibilities under the Education Act 1994. Membership and aims of this committee are outlined at Appendix 1.

The second meeting is the University/Students' Union Operational Group Meeting, which allows regular interaction on operational matters and where day to day issues can be discussed and resolved. Membership and aims of this committee are outlined at Appendix 2.

Review

This relationship agreement should be reviewed on an annual basis, at the Partnership Committee.

**Newcastle University/Newcastle University Students' Union
Partnership Committee**

1. Secretary

Academic Hub Senior Operations Manager

2. Membership

Ex officio members:

- (a) Vice-Chancellor and President
- (b) Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)
- (c) Executive Director of Finance
- (d) Registrar
- (e) Pro-Vice Chancellor (Engagement and Place)
- (f) Academic Registrar & Director of Student Services
- (g) Director of Estates and Facilities
- (h) Chief Executive of Newcastle University Students' Union
- (i) The President of Newcastle University Students' Union

Appointed members:

- (i) Chair appointed by Council
- (j) Three Newcastle University Students' Union Sabbatical Officers appointed by the Newcastle University Students' Union
- (k) One non-student Trustee of Newcastle University Students' Union appointed by the Newcastle University Students' Union

(l) A University People Services Business Partner appointed by the Director of People Services

A quorum shall be not fewer than one third of the members.

3. Aims

(a) To foster good relations between the University and the Students' Union through ongoing dialogue and positive interactions for the benefit of bettering the student experience, including the exchange of strategic priorities.

(b) To agree strategy covering general service and facilities provision within the University and the Students' Union, overseeing implementation, monitoring outcomes and discussing revisions where appropriate.

(d) To receive and consider quarterly accountability reports relating to the constitution, strategy, operations and finances of the Students' Union and in exceptional circumstances report issues of concern to the Charity Commission.

(e) To ensure that quality assurance arrangements are in place to establish and maintain a suitable standard of provision for students within the available resources, recognising increasing student expectations and diverse student requirements.

(f) To keep under review the provision of space for the student population within the University and the Students' Union, recognising the increasing numbers and diversity of the student population.

(g) To formally review and approve the Students' Union constitution at intervals of not more than five years.

(h) To agree and advise Council, via Executive Board, on the annual funding allocations to the Students' Union, including allocations relating to the permanent endowment of the Students' Union Building, the funding of student sport across the University, and to report on other matters as necessary.

(i) To regularly review the Code of Practice, which sets out how the provisions of the Education Act 1994 are implemented.

4. Regularity

The Committee shall meet at least termly.

**Newcastle University/Newcastle University Students' Union
Operational Group**

1. Secretary

PA to the Academic Registrar and Director of Student Services

2. Membership

The membership of this committee although listed may change from time to time depending on what items are brought to the agenda. Members may be represented by appropriate nominees.

(a) Academic Registrar & Director of Student Services (Chair)

(c) Director of Student Health & Wellbeing

(d) Director of Sports Services

(e) Director of Student Progress

(f) Director of Student Success

(g) Head of Estate Customer Service

(h) Head of Learning & Research Support Service, University Library

(i) Head of Hospitality and Commercial Services

(j) All full time Sabbatical Officers of Newcastle University Students' Union

(k) Director of Membership Services Newcastle University Students' Union

(l) Director, Commercial & Operations, Newcastle University Students' Union

(m) Director of Digital & Comms, Newcastle University Students' Union

A quorum shall be not fewer than 3 University members and 3 Students' Union members.

3. Aims

(a) To foster good relations between the University and the Students' Union through ongoing dialogue for the benefit of the student experience.

(b) To discuss any ongoing issues or problems of an operational nature.

(c) To update on key events, campaigns or other activities where both stakeholders would hold an interest.

4. Regularity

The committee shall meet at least termly.