

STRATEGIC PLAN

NUSU
2026





SIMON GERRY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Over the past 12 months NUSU have been taking on board feedback and ideas from students and stakeholders to help inform our new Strategic Plan NUSU 2026. It is clear that the student experience at Newcastle and further afield has been significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic, but whilst this has had a number of negative impacts it has also provided us with an opportunity to refocus our work and examine how we deliver our activities and services.

We've listened to all of the feedback, some of it good, some of it not so good, and used that as the basis for our new Strategic Plan. Everything we do is aimed at making sure students have the best possible experience while at university, be that through academic and social support or the facilities we provide.

ABBIE HUTCHINSON

PRESIDENT

We know that as it stands currently there are areas we need to work on to make sure we are more relevant to certain groups of students which will ensure that we make a positive difference to all our students' lives.

We recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done to achieve our goals which is why the plan runs for 4 years. During that period students will begin to see changes in how we operate and how we communicate with them. We will still want to hear from students throughout which is why we will continue to carry out research and provide opportunities to let us know how they think we're doing.





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AMBITION

To have a positive impact on the experience of every student at Newcastle University.

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to represent, support, develop and enhance the lives and experiences of Newcastle University students.

To deliver our purpose we have identified 4 strategic priorities moving forward:

- . Improving education and empowering students to make positive change.
- . Creating and maintaining student communities and networks.
- . Providing welfare, support and advice services.
- . Helping students personally develop and unlock their potential.



VALUES

REPRESENTATIVE

We represent students' interests locally, regionally and nationally, and empower them to create change, develop skills and unlock their own potential.

SUPPORTIVE

We ensure our students are supported in the best way possible and help them make connections and develop a sense of belonging.

INCLUSIVE

We support equity, diversity, and inclusion and recognise intersectionality. We adjust our services to assist and reflect the evolving, diverse needs of our students.

PROGRESSIVE

We look to the future, seeking new opportunities and partnerships. We are innovative, imaginative and creative, and happy to work in collaboration with others.

EXCITING

We provide opportunities that create good times, positive memories and a fun-filled vibrant experience.

SUSTAINABLE

We take all reasonable steps to minimise our adverse impact on the environment, society and the planet; recognising that we are living through a climate crisis and emergency.

OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Throughout 2021 and 2022 the SU has consulted with officers, students, staff, trustees, and the University to develop this new strategic plan. Here is a summary of our journey.

2021

OCTOBER 21

Sabbatical Officers and Managers discussion on Vision Mission and Values.

Be Heard strategic communications campaign launches.

NOVEMBER 21

Department of SWOT analysis created.
Redbrick Student survey released.

JANUARY 22

Sabbatical Officers review SWOT and PESTLE.
University and external stakeholders consulted.

2022

DECEMBER 21

Organisation SWOT and PESTLEs workshopped.
Redbrick Generation Z research paper received.
Trustee board updated and discussed.
SU council updated.

FEBRUARY 22

Redbrick student survey report received and reviewed.
Initial ideas and themes collated.

MARCH 22

Direction of travel and outline themes, circulated to Officers, Managers and Trustees for feedback.
SU council updated.

APRIL 22

Strategic Plan drafted and shared with Senior Managers.

SEPTEMBER 22

Strategic Plan launched.

JUNE 22

Distributed to key stakeholders and internally to all staff.
Trustee Board approval sought.

MAY 22

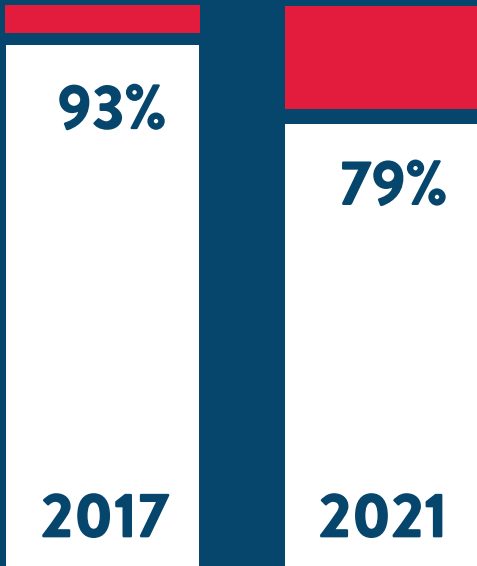
Plan refined and future KPIs set.
Final draft circulated.

THE BIG PICTURE



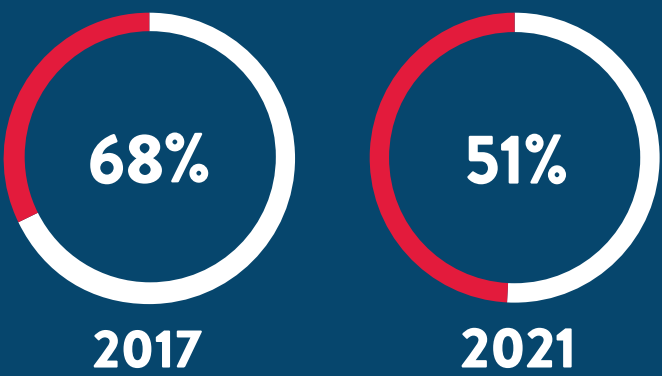
After almost two years of interrupted study due to the pandemic, student satisfaction with their overall Newcastle experience had fallen from 93% in 2017 to 79% in 2021, with 12% ambivalent and 9% actively dis-satisfied.

OVERALL NEWCASTLE EXPERIENCE



Similarly, when looking at overall satisfaction with NUSU, satisfaction had fallen from 68% (and only 5% expressing dissatisfaction) to 51% (and 9% expressing dissatisfaction). Those feeling ambivalent rose from 27% to 35% with high neutrality such as this being indicative of either provision not being aimed at them or they lacked understanding of what was available.

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH NUSU



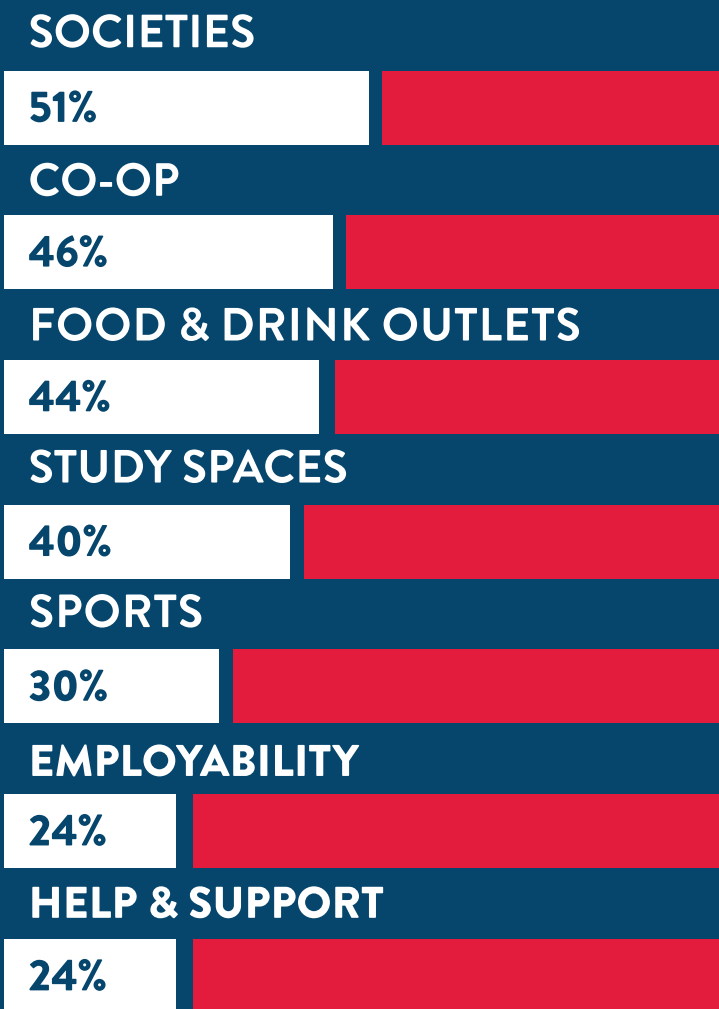
According to the findings of NUSU Student Surveys between 2018 and 2021, there are few major discernible changes in student needs and priorities. The following remain prioritised:

- . Mental health
- . Equality/liberation and student welfare
- . Activities and socialising
- . Quality of education

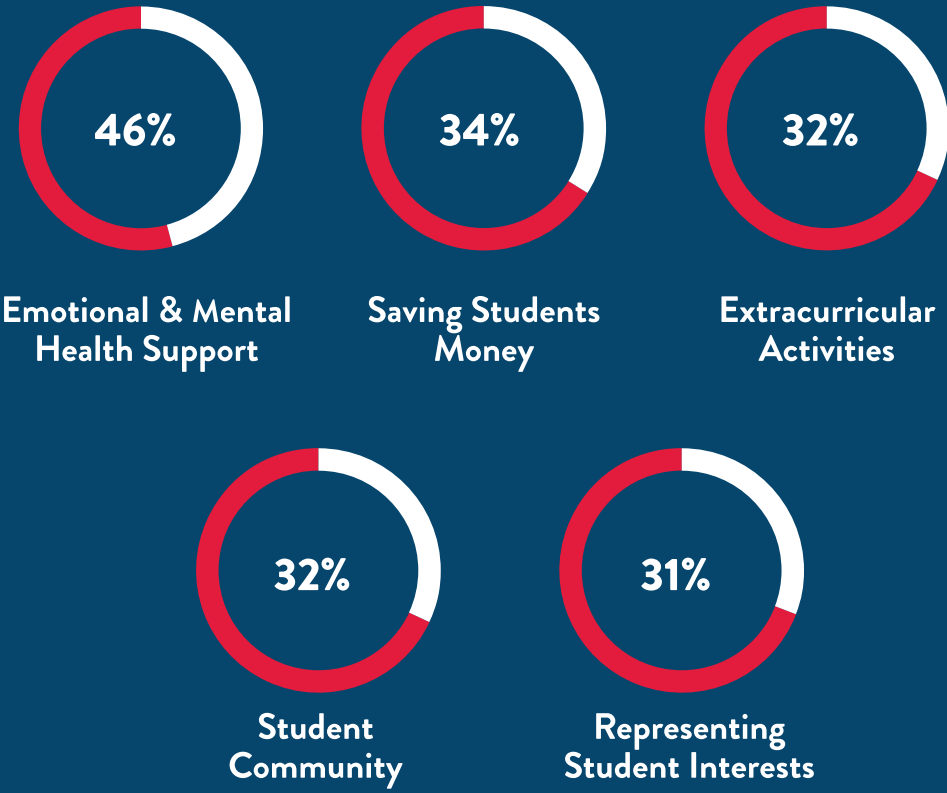
A notable change is the appearance of ‘sustainability and climate change’ among the top six priorities in 2020 and 2021.

Whilst internal surveys over the past 3 years have had student satisfaction as high as 80%, other indicators clearly demonstrate that half or more of our students now don’t have a clear understanding of what NUSU offers on a day-to-day basis. Re-engagement and effective communications therefore must be at the heart of our new strategy.

We asked students what was personally valuable to them:



We asked student to list their top 5 priorities:



OUR RESEARCH

helped us better understand our members

Our research didn't only focus on NUSU services but asked questions designed to help us understand better the attitudes, motivations, and behaviours which will help us provide a more bespoke offering and meaningful communications to students. Students shared their aspirations, their worries, their issues and their priorities from which we were able to undertake an updated segmentation analysis to demonstrate their similarities and differences.

As with our last plan we examined 6 distinct student groups and, whilst the core needs are similar, what we must continue to monitor is the number of students we have in each group and how the demographic of our student body changes over time. It was also clear that when we collect data internally, some segments are under-represented because the questions are not mandatory, and the segment percentage rates differ.



When looking at our segments, Active Engagers, Good Timers and Transformation Seekers (i.e. those who engage with us most and feel part of a community and more connected) they have higher levels of satisfaction. This correlation is important when looking at initiatives to improve both satisfaction with NUSU and the university itself.

As part of our research, we updated our student segments which helps us track demographic changes.

SEGMENTS	2017	2021	COMMENT
Good Timers	18%	20%	Fun Focused
Active Engagers	23%	21%	Enriching
Transformation Seekers	19%	24%	Encouraging
Conflicted Climbers	14%	12%	Open Minded
Career Focused	13%	12%	Preventative
Uncertain Strugglers	13%	11%	Supportive

NUSU STUDENT SEGMENT BREAKDOWN

20%

Good Timers want to get the most out of University, and for the SU to provide them with plenty of opportunities to try new things, make friends and have fun, adding value outside of their course. They enjoy bars, clubs, music, sport and travel and are looking for spaces to relax and socialise between classes.

21%

Active Engagers are the most proactive group in seeking out their own opportunities. Active Engagers have a wide range of hobbies and interests, with most interested in sport, travel and outdoor activities. They enjoy face-to-face rather than online engagement and are the most responsive to opportunities for leadership and entrepreneurship.

12%

Career Focused students are happy for the SU to play a background role, but must be vocal and visible in the efforts by the SU to ensure student views are heard on course matters or issues affecting them at University. They are interested in opportunities to expand their learning through extra-curricular workshops and workshops and favour online provision to face-to-face.

24%

Transformation Seekers are keen to get involved but need NUSU to facilitate their inclusion and help them to get more from their university experience. They want us to connect them with other students and make friends. They are often shy and may struggle to join in which might hinder them from trying new experiences. They favour relaxed and small events such as just for fun sport and may prefer to connect with other students online before meeting in person.

12%

Conflicted Climbers, if NUSU could do one thing for these students, it would be to help them if they have a problem. Many also want help to try new things and meet new people and just like Good-Timers they like to enjoy bars and clubs. They put a lot of pressure on themselves to succeed and are more likely to worry about their studies and struggle with mental health.

11%

Uncertain Strugglers, these students need support and help to integrate into the student community. Like Career-Focused students they prefer online and anonymous support such as website FAQs and emails, they are also the least likely group to ask for help. Like Transformation Seekers they will respond positively to relaxed and informal events where they can meet other students.

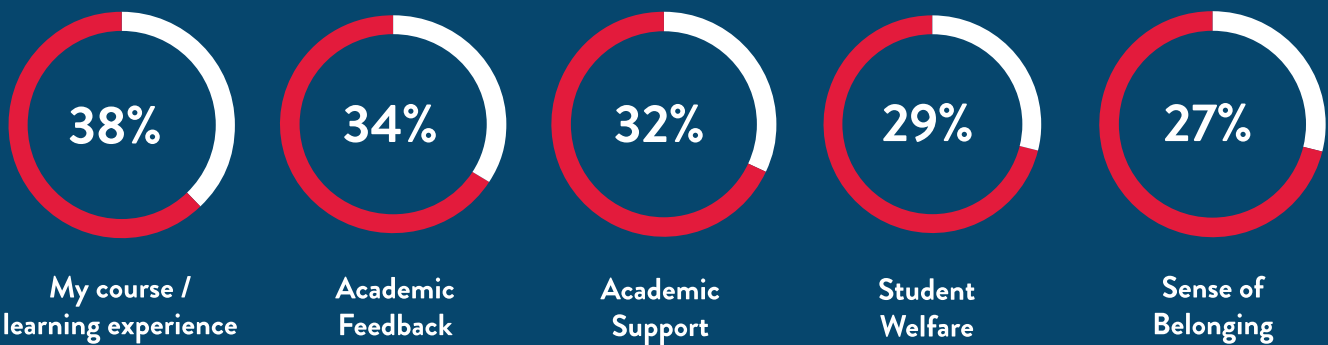
IMPROVING EDUCATION

and empowering students to make positive change

WHAT OUR RESEARCH TOLD US

Students felt the support on their academic courses was sometimes lacking; lecturers lacked empathy and personal tutors fell short of what students want from them. There were calls for more set time to engage directly with teaching staff and for supervisors and tutors to be more approachable. Students also wanted us to engage locally with the City Council on issues such as housing, and nationally with National Union of Students on wider campaigns and policy influencing work.

Where would you like us to focus improvements at Newcastle University to make the biggest impact?



65% of students felt that the student representation system was effective.

86% of students agreed that NUSU campaigned effectively on their behalf.



OUR PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

- . To ensure students are effectively represented, their voices are heard, amplified and acted upon.
- . To empower students to make positive change and campaign on social and environmental issues.
- . To introduce a new transformational digitally enabled representation system.

HOW WE WILL HELP EMPOWER STUDENTS

- . Work with student reps and in partnership with the University to ensure student feedback is listened to and responded to consistently.
- . Introduce a new Student’s Union Customer Relationship Management system and make transformational change to our representation system.
- . Introduce new online tools for use by all Reps.
- . Help and support academic societies become a force for change.
- . To refresh our campaign priorities each year and campaign for change in each of these areas.
- . Continue to represent locally, regionally and nationally the interests of our students.
- . Develop closer working relationships with the National Union of Students and the Russell Group SUs to drive national conversations.
- . Enable students to create change, by providing effective training and skills for our network of representatives.
- . We will become a more legitimate voice and ensure we are absolute champions for liberation, equity and diversity, empowering students to take leading roles in campaigning for change.
- . Provide advice to students that will empower them to improve their own education.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

75% of students will agree that they have the opportunity to have their voice heard.

80% of students will agree that we effectively campaign on their behalf.

75% of students will agree their feedback is listened to and acted upon.

OUTCOME REQUIRED

Students will have a fulfilling learning experience.





CREATING COMMUNITIES

and maintaining networks

WHAT OUR RESEARCH TOLD US

Students want to find something offered by NUSU that they can take part in. We understand that building a sense of belonging and affinity is a key indicator of retention, achievement and happiness. Academic outcomes are also improved by engaging in extra or co-curricular activities. Students want to discover and connect with Newcastle, the City and its opportunities and have an amazing social life; they want more opportunities to socialise both on and off their courses to bond with classmates and form connections with like-minded individuals. Many feel the pandemic has hindered social interaction and feel a concerted effort is needed to improve provision.

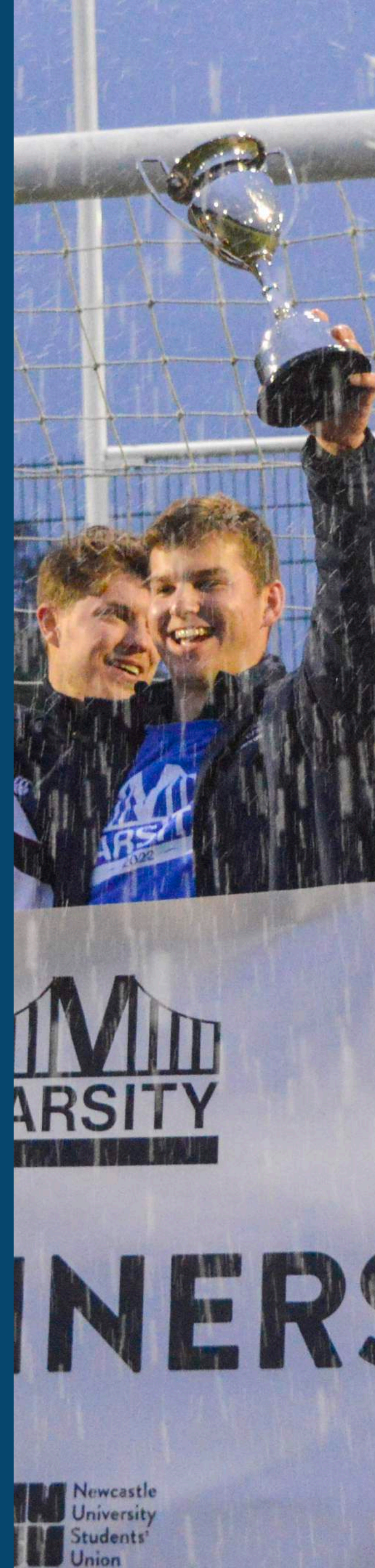
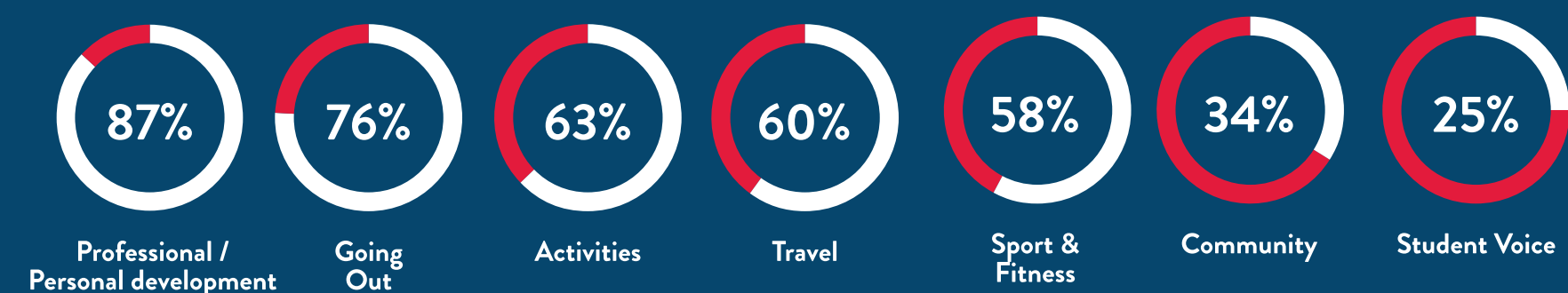
53% of students agree that they feel part of a community at Newcastle University

72% agree that there is plenty of opportunities to interact and make friends.

83% felt that there was always something on at NUSU that they could get involved in.

34% listed extra-curricular activities and sport in their top 5 priorities for NUSU.

Research told us that students are mostly interested in the following extra-curricula activities:



OUR PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

- . Help students create connections to each other, NUSU, the University and the wider community.
- . To provide a diverse range of relevant opportunities, events, and social experiences to meet student interest.
- . To provide community building activities, and space, in which to engage with peers and share similar interests.

HOW WE WILL FORGE A SENSE OF BELONGING

- . Provide an extensive introductory programme aimed at helping student make connections.
- . Deliver fun diverse and inclusive social experiences to help build friendships, memories and communities.
- . Enhance the Give it a Go Programme to include a diverse range of international, cultural, and community events, social activities, and recreational sports.
- . Provide every student the opportunity to connect with their course-based society upon arrival.
- . Ensure cost and accessibility is not a barrier to participation wherever possible through our widening access work.
- . Extend our Discover Newcastle scheme to better connect students with the city offers and discounts.
- . Support students' own ideas to work with local communities and increase social cohesion.
- . Encourage students to diversify our range of societies, student groups and volunteering opportunities to meet all student tastes.
- . Engage with the new University sports strategy to maximise sporting and fitness opportunities for students.
- . Further develop the social experience and bar offering at Cochrane Park for sports teams.
- . We offer a wide range of volunteering opportunities that provide value to the local community.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

80% of students will agree NUSU has helped them make connections.

80% of students will be satisfied (or better) with the range of opportunities offered.

80% of students will agree that engaging with NUSU has helped make them feel part of a community

OUTCOME REQUIRED

Students will engage with NUSU activities, make friends and gain a sense of belonging.

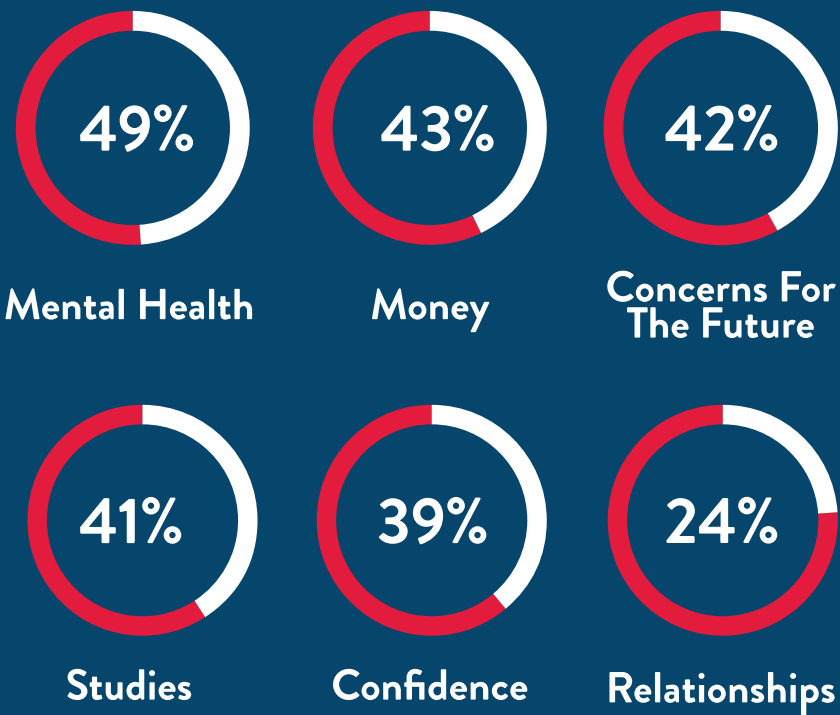


PROVIDING WELFARE, SUPPORT & ADVICE SERVICES

WHAT OUR RESEARCH TOLD US

Students believe that welfare services are of the utmost importance. Half of Newcastle University students suffer with their mental health, whilst money worries, concern for their futures, study challenges and confidence/ self esteem issues are also common. Around a third would like to see improvements to the welfare and support services provided by NUSU.

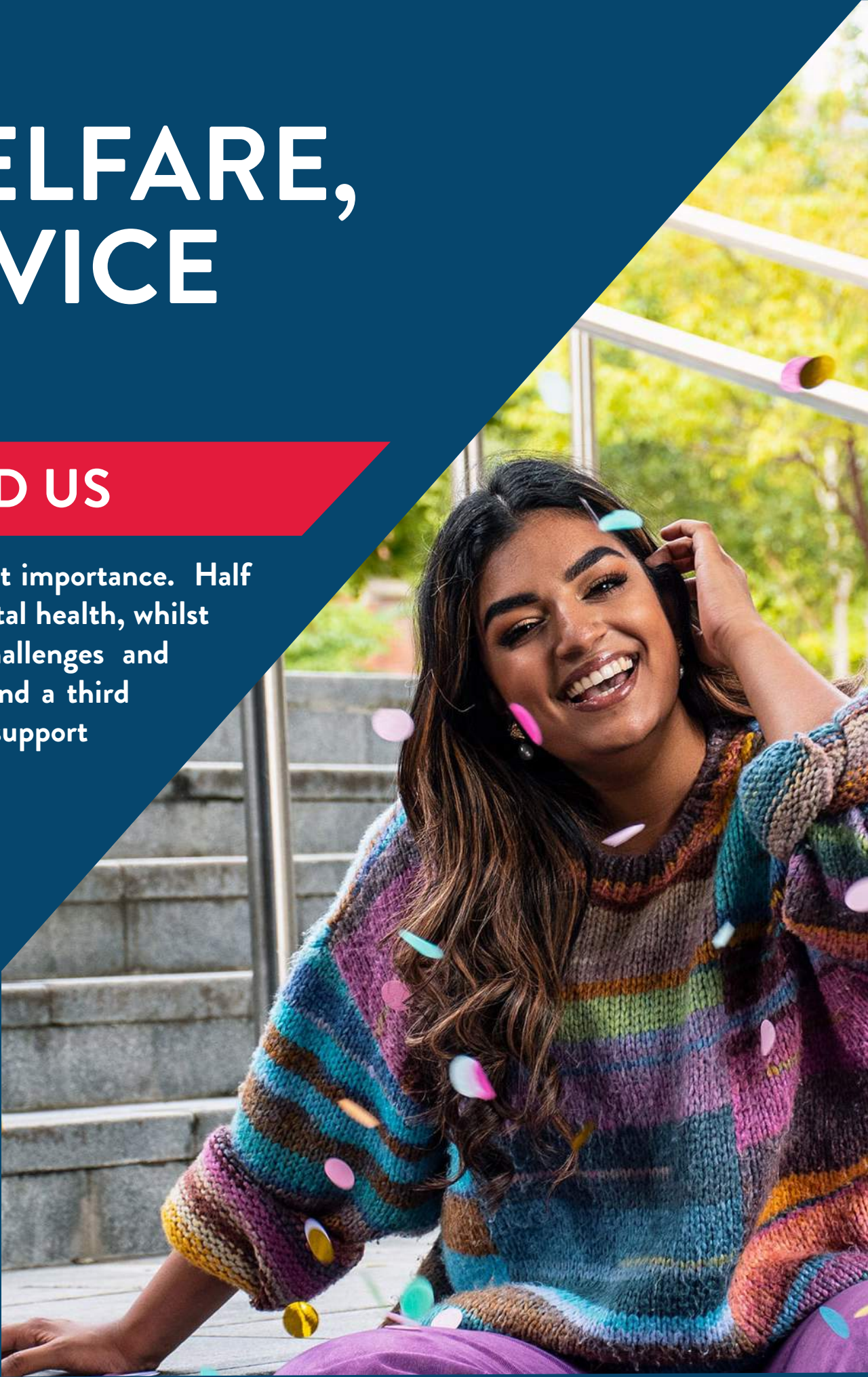
What our students struggle with:



46% of students believe emotional and mental health support should be NUSU's top priority.

37% of students listed welfare or mental health support in their top 5 priorities that NUSU should cater for.

78% of students who sought help felt they got it when they needed it.



OUR PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

- . To empower students to challenge the system and processes that create adversity.
- . Develop and expand services to provide a new more holistic welfare, support, and advice provision.
- . Develop better and clearer referral pathways that make it easier for students to access the support they need.

HOW WE WILL SUPPORT AND ADVISE

- . Introduce a new Support & Advice Hub in the NUSU building.
- . Expand welfare provision to include specific support for intersectional and protected groups.
- . Raise awareness and talk about mental wellbeing, resilience and how to cope with issues.
- . Introduce coordinated wellbeing/mental health support sessions (e.g. meditation sessions, peer groups, digital motivational messages).
- . Investigate ways of providing support in digital formats.
- . Support and signpost students with mental health and other issues in need of counselling.
- . Encourage students to be active and see the benefits of physical health on mental wellbeing.
- . Improve our programme of introducing welfare officers into clubs and societies.
- . Improve support around reducing risks, sexual violence and sexual health.
- . Work in partnership with and promote the University's Student Health and Wellbeing Services Health & Wellbeing Hub and Spoke model.



WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

80% of students will feel they received help and support when they needed it.

80% of students who are satisfied with range of support services available in NUSU.

90% of students who use our Advice Service will be satisfied (or better) with the service they receive.

OUTCOME REQUIRED

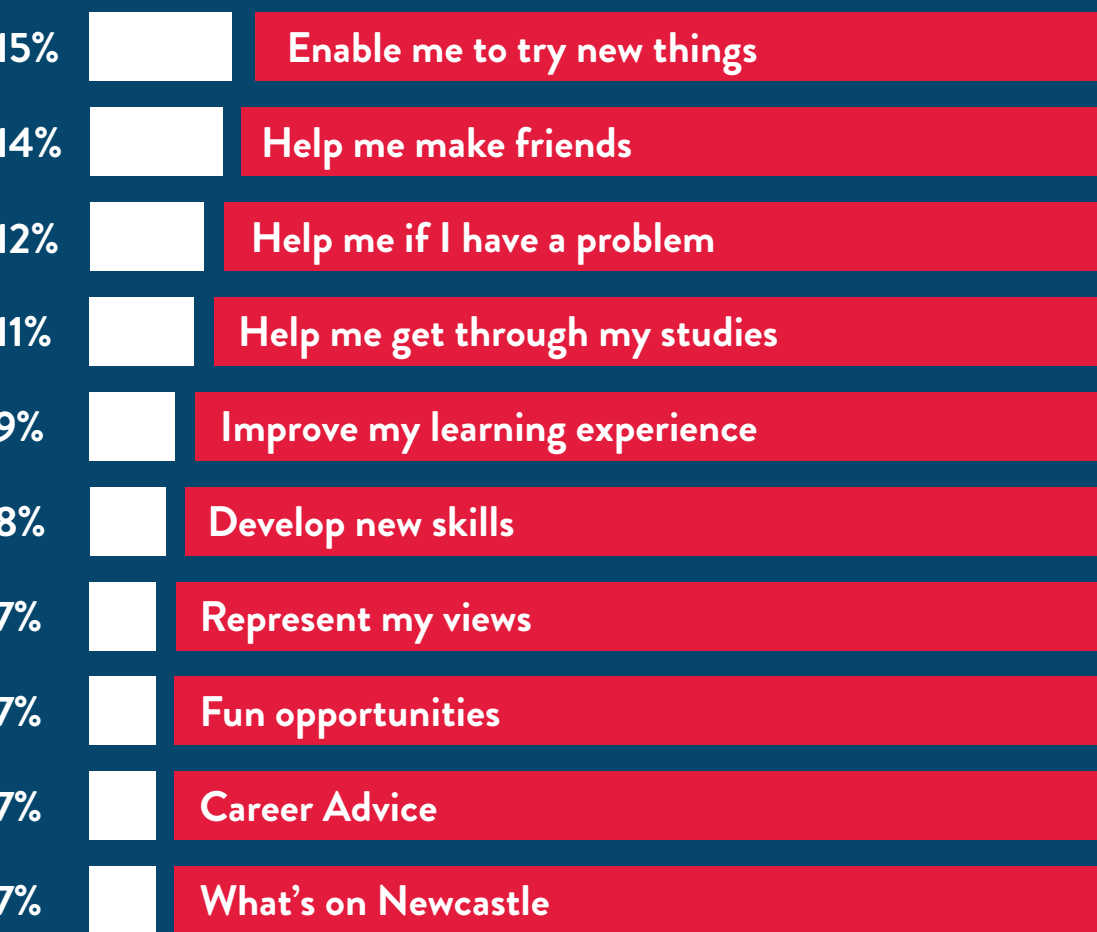
Students will get the help and support they need when they need it.

HELPING STUDENTS PERSONALLY DEVELOP

and unlock their potential

Students want to develop both their life skills and their career skills whilst at University. Helping improve student employability skills was the 6th most valuable thing the students' union offered.

What one key role do students want from us:



92% of students were satisfied with the range of opportunities offered.

64% of students felt more employable as a result of undertaking opportunities with us.



OUR PRIORITIES MOVING FORWARD

- . To ensure students are aware of the opportunities available to them, can reflect on the skills they have and are able to articulate them in a meaningful way.
- . To ensure representatives, leaders and volunteers are equipped with the skills to be effective.
- . To support students in developing new ideas for projects that aid their personal development, especially those within local communities.

HOW WE HELP STUDENTS PERSONALLY DEVELOP

- . Work with the Careers Service to encourage co-creation of learning opportunities
- . Provide clearer links between extra-curricular activities, skills development and potential career enhancement.
- . Continue to enhance our activities to meet student interests and personal development needs.
- . Continue to develop and expand our leadership programmes, and work in partnership with the University on the Employability agenda.
- . Develop and expand our range of useful online learning tools to assist skills development.
- . Recognise and reward student achievement and the development of skills.
- . Highlight benefits of participation and how it can help students achieve their goals.
- . Encourage environmental and sustainability volunteering projects.
- . Pursuing external grant funding to help capacity build for future projects.
- . Provide a focus on sports volunteering and streamline the student journey into sport and wellbeing.
- . Review and refresh the NCL+ programme and concept.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE

75% of students will be satisfied with the range of opportunities offered to develop skills.

80% of students will feel their experience will make them more employable after undertaking an opportunity with us.

The number of students participating in key skill development programmes will increase by 10% year on year.

OUTCOME REQUIRED

Students will emerge from university more confident, independent and equipped with key skills.



Wellbeing

We will recognise and focus on wellbeing as an intrinsic part of everything we do. A student's mental health and wellbeing is central to their ability to make the most of their experience, and 49% of our students told us that struggles with their mental health had affected their overall wellbeing. We will specifically:

- . Look to embed the 5 ways of wellbeing across as many of our activities as possible, and investigate further student targeted wellbeing measures.
- . Create a new Wellbeing outreach team who will focus on prevention but also promote mental health services and help.
- . Train key staff and student leaders in mental health first aid.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:

- 75% of students that are satisfied with NUSU's approach to wellbeing
- 75% of students who agree that NUSU initiatives help promote positive mental health and wellbeing



Sustainability / Climate Action

NUSU acknowledges the urgency around climate action and the serious consequences of inaction. The Union is determined to be at the forefront of fundamental societal changes needed to tackle ecological breakdown. As stated in our values we take all reasonable/equitable steps to minimise our adverse impact on the environment, society and the planet; recognising that we are living through a climate crisis and emergency. We will specifically:

- . Develop a new NUSU Sustainability Plan.
- . Focus on the key areas of campaigning, operations, and communication and link objectives to UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- . Hold the University to account in attaining its carbon sustainable development goals.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:

- NUSU to become Carbon Net Zero by 2030 and monitor progress towards this goal.
- Measure and report on CO2 emissions from NUSU, and mitigation measures implemented to reduce this over time.



Accessibility & Inclusion

As an organisation with a very diverse student body we need to ensure that we are continually thinking about access and inclusion when developing and running activities and services. Our research highlighted that the most common barriers that prevented students getting involved were personal inhibitions, logistical barriers and general lack of awareness. We want to ensure the full diversity of our student body is reflected in everything we do, and recognise that other barriers related to protected characteristics and intersectionality are also factors in engagement with us. We will specifically:

- . Investigate and challenge gaps in students satisfaction between different groups of students and target work accordingly.
- . Ensure all clubs, societies and activities provide an inclusive and welcoming environment.
- . Continue to deliver on and expand on our EDI Strategy and ensure all staff are trained appropriately.
- . Undertake Equality Impact Assessments across all of our activities.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:

- The percentage of students engaging and participating in key activities will be representative of our student demographic.
- 80% of students will agree that we are an inclusive organisation.



ENABLERS

There are 4 key strategic enablers that NUSU need to focus on and resource appropriately to deliver our purpose:

Communications & Engagement

We want to ensure that we effectively re-engage with the student body following the pandemic and rebuild activity and engagement levels to pre-pandemic levels and beyond. We will use digital technology and our new insights on student communications to drive awareness and understanding of our activities and services.

We will specifically:

- . Develop a new Communications Strategy to drive improved engagement which places NUSU at the heart of student life and represents the full student community.
- . Renewed focus on demonstrating the impact of NUSU, our officers, campaigns, services and student reps to the wider student body.
- . Be a data driven organisation using audience research to enhance decision making.
- . Deliver a brand identity refresh to ensure NUSU remains relevant to our students.
- . Implement a new IT MOU with the University to reduce security risks and increase efficiency, as well as introducing the new Students' Union Management System, and a new HR system.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:
80% of students agree they are sufficiently informed of our activities.
90% of students agree that the quality of our marketing materials is satisfactory or better.



Resources

The overall financial objective of NUSU is to provide a robust, solvent and sustainable financial position that supports the Union's core activities and which facilitates the strategic planning, development and implementation of activities and services. We will:

- . Ensure resources are targeted effectively to maximise impact.
- . Increase self-generated income from social enterprises, the NUSU Trading Company and external grant providers.
- . Develop financial plans that are agile enough to react to emerging priorities.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:
To maintain the NUSU reserve funds above £300,000.
Overall, bottom line commercial income contribution to increase to £250,000+.





People & Culture

We know that by motivating our people to do their best by living our values and behaviours, we will create a culture of trust and genuine engagement. We aim to be an excellent employer that demonstrates to our staff that we are genuinely interested in their wellbeing and development. NUSU is an accredited Real Living Wage employer and will look to remain so over the duration of this plan. We will:

- . Create a new People & Culture Strategy that sets out our ambition for our people enabling them to deliver on NUSU's priorities over the next four years.
- . Maintain a positive organisational culture which promotes collaboration and reflects and celebrates the diversity of our student body, by continuing and enhancing our wellbeing and inclusion work.
- . Review our staff benefits package and look to, amongst other things, implement discretionary and accelerated increments to improve talent management.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:

- 90% of staff will be satisfied or better with their working conditions.
- 90% of staff would recommend NUSU as a good place to work.

Facilities

Our iconic building and facilities are integral to providing the activities and services that students want and need. We know from our students that priorities on the use of space have now changed and that some areas are in need of improvement and change. We will look to ensure we use space effectively and prioritise projects to support strategic priorities. We will specifically:

- . Develop proposals for building refurbishment to meet the emerging student needs and wants.
- . Continually improve facilities to ensure we maintain a welcoming, safe and attractive environment.
- . Ensure we carry out operations in line with new priorities within our Sustainability Plan.
- . Look to obtain further space around campus that would further our strategic objectives.

WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE:

- 80% of students will be satisfied with the facilities we provide.
- 80% of students would recommend NUSU facilities to a friend.





OUTCOMES



Students will have a fulfilling learning experience.



Students will engage with NUSU communities, make friends, and gain a sense of belonging.



Students will get the help and support they need when they need it.



Students will emerge from university more confident, independent and equipped with key skills.

KEY OVERARCHING TARGETS

60% of students to engage or participate in at least one core activity or service.

80% of students to express overall satisfaction with NUSU.

80% of students to say that NUSU has had a positive impact on their University experience

National Student Survey ranking to be in Top 20.



nusu.co.uk