



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

20/20

UNION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2015 - 2020

UNION OF STUDENTS IN IRELAND (USI)

UNION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2015 – 2020

Author:

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NOTE: At the end of Phase 2, or year 3, USI Officer board and National Council must evaluate and review the union development strategy as per Congress mandate to fulfil it's purpose in 2020. It is recommended that the strategy be updated accordingly to progress of creating Quality Marks, including templates of field reports and reviewing the data gathered from Phase 1.

FOREWARD

The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) operates in a turbulent landscape. With an annual turnover of members (students and officers) and no clear vision or strategy for driving development forward, USI is at risk of not growing effectively and the student movement steering in a variety of directions. To support our arguments that education is a public good, USI must be effective as a whole on a number of levels to secure our position in supporting part-time and full-time officers, students and staff to thrive. USI must understand that as students and elected representatives, we must develop one clear, evidence-based direction to advance our platform and position to work towards achieving a common good in education and society.

The strategy outlined here and the recommendations will allow for USI (envisioned as a whole) to continue towards supporting our journey to a better USI.

USI is in a space where it is ready to work with member organisations to galvanise and restructure how USI operates and communicates. I am eager to begin what will be a large-scale project for USI but one that is not only necessary but a positive one too. Together, we can focus on shaping our future, shaping the student movement, shaping how local unions operate and ultimately shaping how USI can be a paragon for education in society.

Thank you,



Daniel Waugh

Vice President for Campaigns with
Responsibility for Union Development

2015/2016



BACKGROUND

USI should always seek to assist member organisations to evolve each year with a clear vision. Local issues will always be resolved by local member organisations supported by a national organisation but it is the duty of the national organisation to take the lead on improving development of the local member organisations and union as a whole.

Union development takes a three-tiered formation:

1. Development of the union as a whole as USI
2. Development of local unions
3. Development of the students within the unions

The union development strategy will follow a 5-year period including work that commenced from 2015 when the role of Union Development was created at the USI Congress 2015. Each year will be presented in in phases. Phase 1 or Year 1 will be committed to research and information gathering while phase 2 or Year 2 – 3 will be implementation and evaluation.

Each phase will negotiate the use of Quality Marks through self-reflection and self-evaluation with and between each member organisations. Through recommendations in this strategy, USI will be able to identify if progress has been made, or halted, and to determine how to reach their Quality Marks and goals with the assistance of USI Officer board. Using Quality Marks, USI can deliver positive advice and support on local and current practices, issues around governance, democratic structures and reform, budgeting, campaigns, professionalism, policy formation and daily operations.

The Quality Mark

A Quality Mark is earned by reaching pre-set goals set by the member organisation and will act as a benchmark in the short-term and long-term work of the union and local union. Local unions can achieve these Quality Marks in short-term work but can set out longer-term goals to be achieved in 2, or 3 years time either in tandem with staff and/or students. There should be no limit to Quality Marks, or confining Quality Marks to labels at this point until Phase 1 has been complete. Borrowed from the Quality Mark of NUS UK, the Quality Mark will be flexible to include the unique context in which member organisations exist. The Quality Mark of Students' Unions will assure and improve the quality, standards, strength, communication and effectiveness of students' unions while tackling issues such as the short-

term institutional memory of member organisations. The Quality Mark of NUS is endorsed by the Committee of University Chairs, Universities UK, GuildHE and the Leadership Foundation highlighting the value of such a tool.

Examples of Quality Marks

Most Quality Marks will be determined by evidence collecting in Phase 1. These Quality Marks can be any number of the following:

- Structures and Casework
- Strategic Planning
- Skills and Training
- Democratic Reform
- Campaigns and Communications
- Commercial and Funding
- Awards

SU34

SU34 is a programme set out by the National Union of Students (NUS) UK of work incorporating a report titled SU34: The Future of the Student Movement and is an exploration of how students' unions have changed since the early nineties as a result of the wide regulatory and wider contextual changes in the past 20 years. In response to ongoing financial pressures on the Higher Education sector in Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning has launched, "The Big Conversation." The Big Conversation approaches the task by reflecting on how students' unions are viewed across education and society. NUS review research conducted to identify trends, issues and themes that arise across the student movement as a whole. A number of key themes emerged from this report that influenced how Quality Marks were set.

OBJECTIVES OF USI UNION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:

- To suit different environments on different campuses and to openly support the ever-changing culture of campus life, USI must investigate options for developing clear models and creating measurable outcomes.
- USI must improve support for people of the student movement including full-time, part-time officers, students, staff and anyone who is directly or indirectly involved in the student movement.
- USI must champion supporting leadership and talent development amongst people of the student movement to ensure the movement is strong and effective.
- USI must better understand the impact created by local unions, staff and students and champion.
- USI must gain clarity on the issues faced by the student movement and create resources to overcome these issues.
- USI must constantly redefine achievements in terms of clear purposes and impact intended to create and improve the value of member organisations and their work.
- USI must make innovation natural by developing local unions' ability to challenge conventions by learning how to recognise innovation when it's happening.
- USI must bring issues of purpose and ideology on a national and local scale to the forefront for analysis and to inform and create Quality Marks for marking progress and achieving goals.
- USI must provide campaign materials and resources to help member organisations achieve their Quality Marks
- USI must offer advice, training and support based on feedback, review and expertise to assist with change and daily work to achieve their Quality Marks
- USI must communicate clear, comprehensive updates on national developments affecting the student movement to National Council and be available on www.usi.ie and e-mailed to part-time and full-time officers to send to class reps and students.
- USI must create and facilitate a Union Development Working Group to be open to every member of National Council.
- USI must achieve recognition of Quality Marks to add value to them.
- USI must recognise the needs of students' unions in NUS-USI.
- USI must strive for students' union autonomy and legal protection.
- USI must endeavour to reach out and support Further Education colleges.

PHASE 1 (2015 – 2017)

The first phase of the Union Development Strategy is the most crucial for each level of the three-tier and will focus on research and creating Quality Marks.

Through quantitative and qualitative methods USI Officer board, with the co-operation and collaboration of member organisation's full-time and part-time officers and staff, will be able to determine the Quality Marks, issues, goals and tactics to be implemented in Phase 2.

Research will require a triangulation methodology to determine if a common and distinct issues and goals from each level of the three-tiered approach of USI:

1. Development of the union as a whole as USI
2. Development of local unions
3. Development of the students within the unions

Internal Review

QUANTITATIVE

Participants will include: past USI Officers, past member organisation officers, incoming and outgoing full-time and part-time member organisation officers, staff and part-time and full-time students.

USI must:

- Use quantitative surveying methods to collect data and create a clear picture to begin union development in terms of USI as a whole, each local union, students within the unions.
- Write field reports to complete with each member organisation engagement to track and determine trends or themes of issues and mark progression in goals through observation, local union self-evaluation and discourse.

Member Organisations should:

- Facilitate the quantitative surveying by completing the survey, sharing the survey with students and staff and engaging with the process.

- Assist in completing fields reports through open and honest discourse with USI Officer board on the work being done by USI Officer board and self-evaluation of the work being done by the member organisation itself in achieving goals.

QUALITATIVE

USI must:

- Use focus group sessions with member organisation to gain a deeper insight into developing Quality Marks for each member organisation driven by a semi-structured interview schedule.
- Conduct focus groups with each member organisation executive and with relevant policy officers (welfare officers together in one focus group, education officers in another focus group, for example).

Member Organisations should:

- Facilitate the focus groups by attending these sessions and recommending students, officers and staff.

External Review

The importance of feedback to USI from a diversity of both internal and external perspectives, with particular respect to accountability, clarity of mission and institutional growth are important for successful creation of clear Quality Marks. The huge variation within USI in perspectives, opinions and issues among different member organisations, depending on region, size of member organisations and culture within the particular institution requires external review.

USI must:

- Approach an external organisation to conduct and external review to commence in 2016 who have engaged with USI in the past such as NGOs, trade unions and external stakeholders..
- Conduct an external review process in Phase 1, which collects, analyses and acts upon feedback to be garnered from every member organisation.

- Put together a comprehensive brief to be put forward to a panel of experts or external organisation, with appropriate diversity and balance of expertise and viewpoint, to conduct a snapshot external review of where the union, local member organisations and membership.

- Establish a Union Development Working Group to enact the recommendations of the external and internal review upon approval by National Council and to be chaired by the USI Officer responsible for Union Development.

Member Organisations should:

- Engage with the external review process openly and honestly when possible.

Communication

USI will utilise a variety of communication channels to determine these Quality Marks and ensure the outcomes of Phase 1 is achieved. Communication must occur via two-way, open, and honest dialogue through appropriate channels.

USI must:

- Give adequate notice regarding any research being conducted internally and externally at each National Council, via e-mail, telephone, Facebook Groups, newsletters, and other appropriate pre-determined channels but priority given to professional forms of communication such as telephone and e-mail.
- Give a minimum of 2 weeks notice when conducting research internally and externally.
- Devise a written memoranda of understanding when communicating with member organisations and pinpoint the preferred method of contact for delivering notice or circulating data.
- Identify a point of contact within each member organisations to liaise with regarding union development.
- Adhere to ethics in research and not release any member organisations data to another member organisation, stakeholder, or external organisation without full, clear written permission from the member organisation itself.

Member Organisations should:

- Give a minimum of 1-week(s) notice if unable to facilitate any form of research.
- Appoint a point of contact to engage with the union development process and inform fellow officers and colleagues on updates and outcomes of the process
- Circulate surveys to relevant bodies within the college such as officers, staff and students to garner rich, full datasets.
- Engage and promote the Union Development campaign on their own campus.

OUTCOMES OF PHASE 1

At the end of Phase 1, USI should:

- Have a relative and satisfactory sample size of survey respondents that are confident and statically viable for quality analyses.
- Have analysed quantitative and qualitative datasets from students, local union officers and students to identify clear trends in issues, goals, methods in communicating using statistical applications and methods.
- Create Quality Marks and identify member organisation specific Quality Marks with recommendations of investigating the establishment of a baseline of similar Quality Marks for member organisations to strive for to be stronger.
- Identify similar Quality Marks and if other member organisations have achieved similar benchmarks already in order to share information among member organisations during the Union Development Working Group or at National Council.
- Devise a clear road-map of benchmarks where and when Quality Marks can be achieved with each member organisation.
- Present what Quality Marks are to member organisations at the National Council before Congress 2017 and to be approved at Congress 2017.
- Quality Marks to be agreed on by each member organisations council prior to Congress 2017.

PHASE 2 (2017 – 2019)

IMPLEMENTATION OF PHASE 1

By creating Quality Marks and goals, and identifying issues in Phase 1 and putting strategies and tactic into place to fulfil these aims, USI must implement these strategies and tactics in Phase 2. Prior to Phase 2, USI will have identified similar problems faced by member organisations identified through thematic analysis and statistical analysis of the internal data and recommendations from an external review in Phase 1, along with the unique strengths and weaknesses identified by every member organisation. USI will also have identified the opportunities and methods for growth identified will to be activated in Phase 2.

USI must:

- Utilise the Union Development Working Group to continue the recommendations of the external and internal review upon approval by National Council and to be chaired by the USI Officer responsible for Union Development.
- Ensure the USI MO Portal on www.usi.ie is updated with archived material and with new material for affiliated member organisations.
- Cohesively use the USI Officer responsible for Union Development, the USI President and the USI Vice Presidents for each region to begin work on achieving these Quality Marks, goals and resolving issues identified in Phase 1 and new issues as they arise.

Member Organisations should:

- Contribute openly and honestly to the Union Development Working Group and support the recommendations from Phase 1 in order to achieve individual Quality Marks.
- Engage with USI Officer responsible for Union Development, the USI President and the USI Vice Presidents for each region to begin work on achieving these Quality Marks, goals and resolving issues identified in Phase 1 and new issues as they arise

MEMORY

Turnover of officers on the USI Officer Board of member organisations in Ireland each year sees knowledge, skills and experiences accrued by officers over the period of their officership becoming lost at the end of their term. The turnover of students in higher and further education means that frequent turnover of officers is inevitable but the loss of their knowledge, skills and experience is detrimental.

USI must:

- Utilise the new MO Portal on www.usi.ie to create an archive of USI Officer board Reports, USI publications, local member organisation publications and other material that would assist new officers.
- Ensure comprehensive crossover occurs across each member organisation by providing a best practice guide and a template that can be utilised by every officer.

Member Organisations should:

- Utilise the new MO Portal on www.usi.ie and deliver feedback on how to improve the website.
- Conduct comprehensive crossover and use support from USI Officer board and other member organisations when needed.

STRENGTH OF THE UNION

USI must not operate alone when campaigning on issues relevant to students. The strength of USI must rely on drawing from other organisations or trade unions. Consolidating a strong coalition of staff and students in third level should take effect in Year 2. Furthermore, USI should be seeking to build consensus around the student movement's core belief in higher education as a public good.

USI must:

- Bring student and staff representatives across the country together to make every effort to work alongside one another and to present a strong

coalition that champion higher education as a public good and addresses issues of higher education funding and regulation.

- Over the course of Year 2, USI will formalise coalitions of trade unions, relevant organisations and students to tackle issues mandated by USI National Council.
- Actively seek and investigate possible organisations to become members of with the consent of National Council while engaging in Year 2 and 3 to the best of USI's ability with current membership in Year 1.

Member Organisations should:

- Assist in linking USI Officer board with student and staff representatives in other for an effective working relationship.
- Hold USI accountable and be informed and engage on the work done by the formalised coalition to ensure it's worth is realised.
- Utilise the organisations USI are and will be members of in order to achieve goals set out in Phase 1.

RESOURCES

Through the use of resources and tools, USI can assist member organisations in achieving Quality Marks in their own time with support from USI Officer board.

USI must:

- Make these valuable resources and tools easily available on www.usi.ie and through the MO portal.
- Develop resources and tools that are needed to support member organisations in their daily work and in achieving Quality Marks from evidence in Phase 1.

Member Organisations should:

- Indicate to USI Officer board at any instance what resources and tools might be required.

TRAINING

USI must provide training based on feedback, research and review every year to assist member organisations in achieving Quality Marks and assisting with daily work.

USI must:

- Adhere to the USI Training Strategy presented at USI Congress 2016.
- Use feedback either in the form of quantitative and/or qualitative methods in order to improve training provided by USI Officer board.
- Extend training to assist with the:
 1. Development of the union as a whole as USI
 2. Development of local unions
 3. Development of the students within the unions

NETWORK

USI's affiliated member organisations benefit from a strong network of officers from all over Ireland and are provided with opportunities to network, support and share information.

USI must:

- Continue to facilitate these networking opportunities through a National Council and through setting up Facebook Groups for part-time, full-time officers with separate Facebook Groups for each individual grouping of officers.
- Consider setting up Facebook Groups for students who share common interests from all over Ireland to facilitate opportunities for networking, sharing information and easily mobilising students.
- Create new opportunities for member organisations to network outside of National Council.

Member Organisations should:

- Attend as many networking opportunities as possible and pro-actively engage with other member organisations to gain information and support.

EVALUATION

Throughout each Phase, constant evaluation and monitoring must occur. It is recommended that evaluation does not occur at the end of each year.

USI must:

- Provide online feedback through the MO portal on www.usi.ie.
- Conduct a full evaluation of union development and progress of achieving Quality Marks at every quarter and use National Council as a space for receiving feedback through the Union Development Working Group.
- Monitor union development through USI Officer board field reports, longitudinal quarterly surveys, ad-hoc conversations, e-mail interactions and discussions with member organisations.
- Engage in active issues management and risk management to identify issues and resolve them as they arise.
- Take note of issues using field reports.
- Report to National Council progress on union development and make these reports available online and distributed to member organisations.

Member Organisations should:

- Openly and honestly engage with evaluations in order to ensure development of the union can continue effectively.
- At any moment raise issues with USI Officer board and deliver feedback through appropriate methods.

COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

Communication is essential for the union to develop. USI must be a two-way communication to engage with 354,000 students and over 90 affiliated member organisation full-time officers.

USI must:

- Utilise social media channels to communicate with affiliated member organisations.

- Utilise a member organisation newsletter by which class representatives can voluntarily sign up to and receive updates on the work done by USI Officer board.

- Utilise www.usi.ie to provide updates on the work done by USI Officer board, local unions and the work done by students and student media.

OUTCOMES OF PHASE 2 - 3

At the end of Phase 1, USI should:

- Have implemented Quality Marks and achieved a sizable number of Quality Marks for each member organisations.
- Gone through a review of Quality Marks after Phase 1 and year 2.
- Succeeded in monitoring Quality Marks and issues that may have appeared and overcome them.
- See measurable changes or outcomes of Quality Marks and the union development plan relevant to the goals set out by member organisations.

PHASE 3 (2019 - 2020)

FORMAL REVIEW OF PHASE 2 AND CONGRESS 2019

REMINDER: *At the end of Phase 2, or year 3, USI Officer board and National Council must evaluate and review the union development strategy as per Congress mandate to fulfil it's purpose in 2020 and decide at Congress 2019 whether to formally renew the strategy in its updated form, revoke the strategy or formally update the strategy with new review procedures, communication or otherwise new content since the adoption of this strategy. It is recommended that the strategy be updated accordingly to progress of creating Quality Marks, including templates of field reports and reviewing the data gathered from Phase 1.*

It is recommended that a new strategy be devised to ensure union development continues for USI.



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