



Communication Strategy 2019-22

Introduction

This document outlines our strategic approach to how we communicate with members of Bucks Students' Union. It is intended to provide staff and stakeholders with an informed plan, from member-led research, outlining the strategies we use to engage with our members and how we intend to talk to them. We recognise that we operate in an environment that is constantly changing, with a diverse membership that consumes information in different ways and this plan aims to outline the different audiences and relevant channels to increase member engagement.

Strategy 2019-22

Everything we do is underpinned by our Strategic Plan which has been created through member and stakeholder research. Our plan is ambitious, but fully aligned to the needs of the membership and helps us *make life better for students at Bucks*.



Our core values and cornerstones

These core values not only lie at the heart of our identity, but also form the characteristics and personality of the organisation and represent the behaviours we expect and encourage from our staff, volunteers and wider membership:

Dynamic

Inspiring

Tenacious

Passionate

Inclusive and friendly

Innovative

Responsible

Coherent

Professional



Key aims and objectives:

The aim of this Communications Strategy is to assist in the day-to-day communications decision-making within the organisation. In particular, the strategy aims to help us:

- achieve our overall strategic aims
- engage effectively and establish two-way communication with our members
- engage effectively with other key stakeholders
- ensure people understand who we are and what we do
- communicate our successes and the benefits of engagement with us
- encourage broader and deeper engagement
- increase participation.

Challenges and opportunities:

Union staff have identified several key issues surrounding communications:

- There is a lack of understanding of harder to reach students and engagement with them.
- Although our social media channels are more consistent, there is still room to improve them and specifically look at our tone of voice. We also don't get as much traction with traditional social media channels.
- Emails are still a popular communication channel but there is an opportunity to focus on content and make them more tailored.
- Our sabbatical officers have a low profile in the minds of our members, which limits their effectiveness in promoting greater engagement.
- There is a lack of mapping out campaigns, specifically with relevant communications channels, and the impact of some campaigns are not fully measured.
- We don't share and celebrate our successes enough which could help improve our visibility and reach within the student body.



Success stories:*

- The Students' Union is seen to embody some key values: friendly (42%), fun (30%), accessible (28%), supportive (25%) and dedicated (23%).
- The Students' Union is recognised as an avenue for building key skills with a large proportion of students wanting to learn new skills for both their career and for life, gain independence and confidence and to challenge themselves intellectually.
- There is evidence that targeted communication has been effective with over two-thirds saying that our communications are good or very good.
- Over two-thirds agree or strongly agree that the Students' Union has the power to create change and make things happen at the University.

Research shows that:*

- 41% of campus based students recognise themselves as being members of the Students' Union with just over a third saying they are not members and the remaining 25% unsure
- just under 50% of students agree that the Students' Union has a real impact on their student experience
- around one third either agree or strongly agree that the Students' Union has helped develop skills
- students are unlikely to describe the Students' Union as 'tenacious', despite it being one of our core values – with only 2% using this as a word to describe the Students' Union
- there is a continued need for the Students' Union to educate students about its purpose and how it relates to their experience at Bucks.

*Research taken from the 2019 Membership Survey



Objectives

To help us deliver this plan, we've split it into five strategic objectives:

- 1. Fully develop our brand**
- 2. Understand our members**
- 3. Invest in technology**
- 4. Improve communications around our campaigns**
- 5. Celebrate our success**



Fully develop our brand

Having a clear and identifiable brand will enable our members to have a better understanding of the Union and make us more transparent

Embed our brand within staff culture

Our brand is important to us. It is completely unique to Bucks Students' Union and distinguishes us from the University. It's crucial that our members know exactly what services we offer and that every activity, event, session or workshop, organised by us, is funded and provided through the Union. By consistently branding all assets, we will enable our members to identify and fully appreciate the range of services that we offer – leading to a higher level of transparency and trust.

Develop our tone of voice

Whomever we're speaking to, we should always sound like us. Through research, we have been able to generate a bank of key words that our members best associate with us. Our tone of voice should be aligned to these key words and, if applied consistently, our members are more likely to recognise us and understand what we're about.

Be clear and consistent

Everything we say should be as clear and simple as possible, as well as respectful of the fact that not all of our members come from the same background. We should not overcomplicate key messages and should try to keep everything jargon free, where possible. This should be applied consistently across everything that we do and should never come across as patronising or unfriendly.

Objectives: key targets

- members are able to recognise and easily identify our core values and to respond positively through the membership survey
- 80% of our members are able to say that our communications are sufficiently detailed and informative
- members are able to associate the cornerstones of the Union and rate them highly.



Understand our members

Our members are the backbone of the organisation and understanding their interests and behaviours is vital

Log all interactions with our members

Using our website and customer relationship management (CRM) system, we will log all interactions with individual members. This will build a detailed profile of each member and will span across their entire time as a student at Bucks. It will log all engagement, including all activities, events and workshops, and will detail elections they have voted in. Logging all of this information will allow us to explore trends and analyse engagement at a granular level and will also help deliver the required content for additional initiatives, such as The Bucks Award. It will also enable us to broaden our offer to different groups and explore ways to engage with the members we class as harder to reach.

Understand behaviours and attitudes

As a dynamic organisation, that is member-led, we need to evolve to enable us to remain relevant and meet the needs of our members. We will work hard, and use all available tools, to expand our insights into the membership to better understand the behaviour and attitudes of our members. This will be primarily driven through data insights through surveys and other mechanisms.

Measuring engagement

We will provide departments with the tools, resources and support to equip them with member engagement data through demographic reports. This will enable departments to have a better understanding of engaged members and highlight less engaged groups. We will also produce additional reports that will analyse engagement across the broader Union – benchmarking figures against the total student population.

Objectives: key targets

- complete all service level demographic reports on a monthly basis and to provide a full breakdown of stats, compared to the full student body, on an annual cycle
- a total of 25% equivalent, of the full-time undergraduate student body, to complete the annual membership survey
- 70% to respond positively on satisfaction of the Union.



Invest in technology

We should invest and fully embrace technology to harness the power of data and gain a deeper insight into our membership

CRM solution/website

We have invested both in software and staff resources to work within a CRM system. This system is fully integrated with the University's student records and gives us full access to the data of our members. From this, we are able to monitor and track the touchpoints of our members and build up an engagement profile – spanning the entire lifecycle of each member. Our website is able to fully analyse the make-up of specific groups and can produce demographic reports, enabling us to adapt and tailor our offer/message to different cross sections of the student body.

Tailored communications

Using our website, we are able to group together our communications and send tailored emails to different groups based on a number of demographic traits. By sending tailored communications, we will strengthen our engagement as the information will be tailored to that specific group who would be more inclined to sign-up or read through the email.

Digital resources and new trends

We recognise that our membership is diverse and we should always be looking at new and different ways to engage with them. Whilst traditional channels of communication still work, we should always be looking into new digital trends and expanding our communication channels.

Staff training to use the website effectively

Our website is an important tool to help drive this strategy, but it should be fully up-to-date. A key part to ensuring that it's updated is giving staff the access and appropriate training to deliver this. The Communications and Marketing team will provide regular training sessions and briefings to all staff so they understand how the site works and have an appreciation for the functionality of the system.

Produce content-rich material

Content-rich material should be a consideration when launching any campaign or message through our digital channels. A video or simple animation will draw attention a lot quicker than a standard post and offer something back to the audience other than a simple image or actionable link.

Objectives: key targets

- grow the number of visits to the main Union website to 600,000
- 50% open rate on tailored e-shots
- 60% of our members are able to say that our communications are relevant to their interests
- 80% of members saying that our communications are clear and easy to understand
- all operational staff will receive full training on the website as part of their induction process.



Improve communications around campaigns

Campaigning is an important part of what we do. Campaigns should be planned properly, delivered to the right audience and effectively measured

Effective campaign planning

There should be a purposeful reason for each campaign that has a simple core message behind it. Each campaign should be properly thought out to ensure the best results and that it fully engages the student body or a specific target audience. The Communications and Marketing team will produce a communications plan for each campaign which will outline the core message, timescales and selected communication channels.

Right tone of voice for the audience

When planning a campaign, it's important to think about the target audience and how they will engage with it. It's important to keep the message as clear as possible but to also ensure that it's applied consistently across all channels to maximise awareness. The Communications and Marketing team will work with teams within the Union to provide support and help get the right tone of voice.

Utilise effective channels

We have a multitude of channels available for communicating to our members, but picking the right ones is vital to the success of any campaign. The Communications and Marketing team will work with teams to select the right channels and help tailor the communication, based on the target audience. Where possible, content-rich material should be used to help communicate campaigns in a different way and to broaden our reach. We will work hard to make campaigns unique so they really stand out and ensure maximum exposure.

Measure the success

Throughout all campaigns, we'll use analytical tools to review and enhance further communication. At the end of each campaign, we'll measure success against targets and fully evaluate which channels have worked effectively. This will not only help measure the success of the campaign, but also inform future campaigns and allow us to further improve insights into our communications networks.

Objectives: key targets

- communications plan to be produced for all key campaigns and ensure there are relevant targets in place
- 50% of students are able to say that the Union effectively represents their views
- produce and communicate a set of style guidelines for all Union staff to follow.



Celebrate our success

Sharing and celebrating our work will make us a more transparent organisation and demonstrate the value of getting involved

Generate more news-based articles

We'll share and celebrate our successes across all channels to raise awareness of the different work that we do. This will lead to a better understanding of our organisation and make us more transparent. We'll also work alongside the University to share our successes beyond the University community and raise our profile within the local area.

Produce an impact report

At the end of each academic year, we'll produce an impact report that will benchmark our work against key performance indicators and the Strategic Plan. The impact report will be a summary of our successes across the past year and will be produced in a format that can be easily shared across our membership and at a higher level – both across the University community and with other key stakeholders. We will generate different versions of the report and communicate this widely across the membership.

Member snapshot videos

We'll produce a series of short videos which will showcase the benefits of getting involved in different areas of our work. These will be story-based and will try to ignite an emotional connection with our work. We will use these videos in a targeted way to either raise awareness of the work we do or to encourage our members to get involved.

Objectives: key targets

- 60% of students are able to say that they have a good understanding of what the Students' Union does on a day-to-day basis
- to achieve a total of 1,200 responses through the More Than A Bar campaign by 2022, per year
- to publish at least one 'good news' story on our website every fortnight that is widely shared across our social media channels.





bucksstudentsunion.org
union@bucks.ac.uk
01494 601 600

Bucks Students' Union
Queen Alexandra Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP11 2JZ

This publication was produced by Bucks Students' Union in January 2018, and is accurate at the time of going to press. We will consider any requests for accessible formats that may be required.

© Bucks Students' Union 2018

