



Information Sheet:

Applying for a Students' Union (SU) Role from Outside the Sector

If you're new to the Students' Union (SU) or Students' Association (SA) sector, applying for a job in it might feel like stepping into the unknown. This information sheet is here to give you the key insights you need about Students' Unions and their role in university life.

What is a Students' Union?

SUs are student-led organisations that operate independently from the university it's associated with. It exists to represent and support students, advocating for their interests and providing opportunities for involvement in campus life.

- **Membership:** Every student is automatically a member of their SU (membership is free, though some activities may require a fee).
- **Activities:** SUs offer a variety of activities, including societies, sports clubs, advocacy campaigns, and social events. Students can also access independent advice on academic, housing, finance, and wellbeing issues.
- **Commercial Services:** Many SUs also run commercial outlets such as bars, nightclubs, shops, and cafes.
- **Operations or Business Support:** There will also be usual business functions within SUs. These duties, like People, Finance, and Communication, may be managed in-house or outsourced.



Key Roles within the SU

Full-Time/Sabbatical Officers

Elected by students, these officers take a year off their studies to lead their SU.

They work alongside permanent staff, representing students' interests at the university, working on campaigns, and advocating for students' needs at both the university and national levels.

Think of them as student MPs—the officers are elected to lead, while staff support their efforts, similar to civil servants.

CEO and the Senior Leadership Team

Employed by the SU, the CEO and Senior Leadership Team's role is to capture the vision and ambitions of the students, Officers and staff and turn them into tangible strategies.

Staff

Employed by the SU, the staff team work closely with the students, Officers, managers and SLT to contribute to and deliver the strategy.

The Trustee Board

SUs are governed by a Board of Trustees, which ensures that the SU acts in the best interests of students and is compliant with charitable legislation and corporate responsibilities. The Board typically includes elected officers, student trustees (either elected or appointed), and external trustees with relevant expertise.

What Does a Students' Union Do?

SUs provides various forms of support and advocacy for students:

- **Student Advocacy:** SUs represents students who face challenges with academics, housing, finance, discrimination, and more.
- **Support Services:** They offer confidential advice, peer support networks, and various campaigns to improve student welfare.
- **Community Building:** SUs fosters connections through societies, student groups, and events, promoting a vibrant campus life.

NUS (National Union of Students)

NUS is one of the largest student organisations globally. It works to make education free and accessible to all, with a strong focus on equality, inclusion, and students' rights.

NUS is a membership organisation of around 400 students' unions and association across the UK. Whilst most SUs and SAs are affiliated with NUS, it is worth checking to see if the SU or SA has membership.

For its members, NUS is a great source of information, support, training, and services that you and/or your organisation might find useful.

Funding and Financial Support

SU are typically registered charities and are either incorporated or unincorporated organisations. Their funding comes from multiple sources:

- **University Block Grant:** The university provides an annual block grant to cover core SU services (representation, support, activities).
- **External Funding:** SUs may receive smaller grants from sources like the National Lottery, charitable trusts, and sponsorships for specific projects.
- **Commercial Activity:** Many SUs run commercial ventures (e.g., bars, cafes, shops) to generate additional income. In large SUs, this could make up a significant portion of the budget—sometimes 80% or more of their total income.

For instance, a large SU might have a total income of £6 million annually, with £1.3 million coming from the block grant and £4.7 million from commercial activities such as catering, merchandise sales, and media services. This requires a large team, including many student staff members on casual or zero-hours contracts.

In Summary

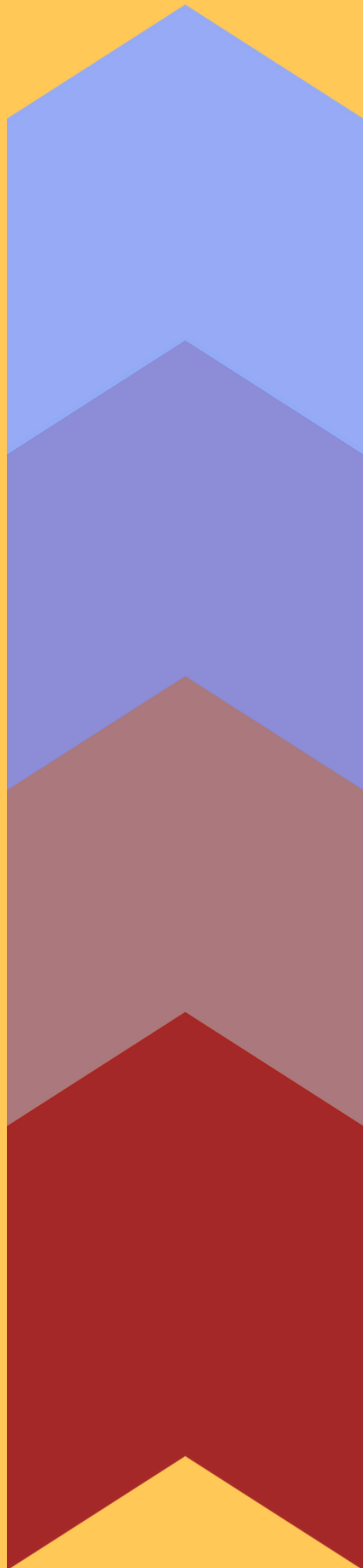
SUs and SAs are student-run organisations that provides support, advocacy, and a wide range of activities for students. Elected officers take a year out from their studies (usually at the end of their course) to work full-time to serve their student body. These full-time elected Officers will also serve as members of the Trustees Board.

SUs and SAs are as diverse as the university, college, or educational provider they are associated with. Some are small and specialist; others are large, multi-departmental organisations. Their priorities and challenges will uniquely reflect their members, staff, location, and history. What they do share, is a values-driven approach to serving their members.

Funding will come in different forms, including university block grants, external funding, and income from commercial activities. Their governance will include a mixture of members and external trustees.

This sheet should give you a clearer picture of how SUs and SAs operate and how they contribute to student life. We hope it helps you in your application!

SU's Organisational Structure



Trustee Board

Senior Leadership Team (CEO, Deputy and Heads)

Management Team (Managers)

Staff (Coordinators, Advisors, Supervisors, Administrators, Student Staff)

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