

WHAT'S NEXT III?

Our plan for 2020-2024

WHY DO WE NEED A PLAN?

In 2016 the Students' Union launched a programme of significant positive transformation, to enable it to better serve its members and deliver more impact for students at Royal Holloway. Since this point, we have been through two periods of fundamental change. The first was characterized by the phrase 'looking in', as we rebuilt the organisation's infrastructure into a modern charity delivering relevant student services aligned to a clear strategy. The second phase, enabled by a wholesale review of our democratic structures, has focused on our role as the legitimate voice of Royal Holloway students. By looking out, we redesigned our research, policy and lobbying activities around the three key themes of student voice, student insight, and student interests. This has begun to drive forward a much more sophisticated and impactful agenda that really puts effective representation at the heart of the Students' Union.

But we're not complacent, we know there is still a lot more work to do, and we're excited by the opportunities in front of us. Four years after the start of our transformation, we've again taken stock to ensure our plan is still relevant and fit for purpose. What's Next III is the third resulting step in this journey, allowing us to sharpen some of our priorities and associated measures of success.

But we also recognise that our plan doesn't sit in a silo. It launches at the same time as the University's own new strategy which contains a renewed focus on how the institution can deliver positive outcomes for all students. The ideas contained within this plan are a broad articulation of the contribution we expect to make.

Jack O'Neill (President 2019-20)
Tom Flynn (Chief Executive)

THE CHALLENGES

A huge amount of research and analysis has gone into this plan, and we're confident we know what you want us to be doing. But we also need to acknowledge that we face some big challenges, and that since our first plan in 2016, these have changed significantly. It is important that we consider how the external environment is likely to change over the next four years, and what impact this will have on the University, the Students' Union, and our student members.

Increasing Student Numbers

The University has plans for the student population to grow modestly over the next four years, which in turn will have an impact on the services both organisations can provide. We must consider how scalable our own current operation is, and which parts of the Students' Union will require more resources as numbers grow. This will involve compromise and prioritisation as we seek to balance competing demands.

Changing Student Demographics

It is also true that the student population will change over the next four years. The data suggests that we will see more diversity in our membership, as well as more students who choose to study via different mechanisms, living in different places. We must ensure that our services and activities are accessible and relevant for all students from all backgrounds.

Regulation and Sector Uncertainty

We do not exist in a vacuum. As a new regulator, the Office for Students is beginning to play a more active role in the sector than ever before. And the political context facing higher education over the next four years, as well as the wider country, is far from certain. We must respond to society's

changing expectations on universities and students' unions, as well as play a stronger role shaping a positive narrative over the impact we have.

Location, Location, Location

This is both a strength and a challenge. We must recognize the opportunities that being close to London provides, but also deal head on with the challenges it presents. The high cost of living and small local community is a significant barrier for our students and staff alike. As the University looks to expand its footprint with the Rusham Park development and growth in the central London campus, we must consider how the Students' Union should respond to this.

Tradition, Heritage and Reform

The University is steeped in history, which shapes how it operates today. But it is also now focusing on delivering a new strategy, and embedding a new operating model for its academic units. We must ensure our lobbying and representation work is more closely aligned with this configuration, creating more impact at a local level for students.

HOW DOES THE PLAN WORK?

Great strategy is easy to understand and straightforward to follow. Which is why this plan follows a very simple structure.

- A. We state what our overall mission and vision is.
- B. We define what this means for our students.
- C. We articulate how we work through our values.
- D. We identify the factors that will enable us to achieve our aims.
- E. We set targets that measure our performance against clear goals.

A. WHY DO WE EXIST? OUR MISSION

Our mission is simple: we're here to make student life better at Royal Holloway.

B. WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO FOR YOU? OUR AIMS.

Our mission probably seems really simple. But in reality, if we ask 100 students what the most important thing that we do is, we'll probably get 100 different answers. So we've broken it down to five key areas that you've said you want us to work on. Some of these ideas will involve delivering services ourselves or in partnership, whilst some will mean lobbying the University other organisations to do more. In each section we set out some context regarding the key developments we've made over the past four years, before setting out a number of big ideas for change that we'll be working on over the next four years.

B1. Improve your education

It's the number one reason you're a student at Royal Holloway, and it's what you've told us you spend most of your time doing. Every survey tells us you want us to work on making your academic experience better. Higher quality feedback. Extra contact time. Better study facilities. More innovative use of technology in the classroom. Since What's Next I in 2016, we've made *significant* progress on this theme from a largely standing start – building a team to support elected Officers and student representatives, and developing a clear agenda around your academic interests. But we know we need to do more in this area.

Some of the big ideas we'll be working on over the next four years include:

- i. Develop and deliver an impactful agenda to drive educational change at a university level, utilising high quality research and meaningful consultation to shape all our policy work.
- ii. Empower students to shape their educational experience, supporting academic representatives to make positive changes at a school, department and programme level.
- iii. Undertake a full review of the role of academic societies, establishing a clear plan in collaboration with the University to ensure they are supported and facilitated in their contribution to educational communities.

B2. Make your campus fun

Something we've always known that we need to do, and the single most popular area identified by you as a priority for us. But with changing tastes and expectations higher than ever, we know it's important we do this well and help make your time at Royal Holloway as fun as possible. Since What's Next I in 2016 we've made a deliberate effort to significantly increase the range and types of events we put on, catering for more varied interests and levels of commitment. But we also know we need to continually ensure that we're responding to your demands, and we know we need to do more to remove the barriers you face getting involved with extra curricula activities which fulfill your passions.

Some of the big ideas we'll be working on over the next four years include:

- i. Deliver a relevant, high quality and diverse events programme, providing a range of opportunities for all students, from all backgrounds, on all programmes, to participate in.
- ii. Support all student-led groups to be more sustainable, accessible and inclusive, helping them to have a more positive impact on the experience of their members.
- iii. Empower and facilitate students to build their own communities built around shared interests and shared locations that are relevant to them.

- iv. Support students to organise their own activities, assisting them with the planning and running of events.

B3. Look after your wellbeing

We also know it's really important that we play a role in supporting your health and general wellbeing. And that a lack of money during your studies to fund basic living costs is an issue that many students face. Student housing is also a huge area we need to make an impact on, raising the quality and reducing the financial burden. And we've also got a role to play promoting both physical and mental wellbeing, keeping you happy and healthy. Since What's Next I in 2016, we've reshaped our advice offer to focus on the areas we know we can make tangible impact on, reducing our duplication with the University. We've also begun to play a role in the private housing sector, and have significantly increased the amount of money put back into student pockets in part time roles. But now we need to concentrate on activities that have the biggest impact on the greatest number of students.

Some of the big ideas we'll be working on over the next four years include:

- i. Lobby the University to improve its services targeted at improving the physical and mental health of students, and deliver activities ourselves in pursuit of this agenda.
- ii. Broaden the portfolio of advice we offer and make it more accessible via technology, reaching more students.
- iii. Offer more specialist housing and academic advice and support at key transition points in your student journey, conducting more preventative work on the basis of intelligence gathered via individual cases.
- iv. Develop a clear and positive agenda for both the private housing market, and campus student accommodation, ensuring students get access to better services and are an engaged part of the community.

B4. Make you more employable

We know that once you've finished studying, the graduate job market is tough. There are so many ways that getting involved in extra curricula activities can help you with your eventual career. But at the moment we don't make these clear enough. And we know you expect us to work alongside the University to ensure it is adequately supporting you in your professional development. Since What's Next I in 2016, we've made some progress in this area, focusing on increasing the quantity and quality of the employment opportunities we provide students, and articulating a clear vision for how we expect the University to improve. But now we need to accelerate our work and consider all of the ways that getting involved in the Students' Union can contribute to improving your potential graduate employment.

Some of the big ideas we'll be working on over the next four years include:

- i. Lobby the University to ensure that the Careers Service, academic departments, and all areas that employ students provide effective support in relation to their graduate employability and professional development.
- ii. Launch a student leadership academy to support the personal and professional development of students involved in all voluntary and paid leadership roles, positively impacting on their own 'employability'.
- iii. Ensure student leaders are able to clearly articulate this experience when entering the graduate job market, positively impacting on their own 'recruitability'.

B5. Empower you to change the world around you

Higher Education is transformative for people at all stages in their lives. It inspires and drives people to look at things how they could be, rather than how they are. We know we need to support you in driving change and making the world around you a better place: in the Students' Union, in the University, in the local area and beyond. Since What's Next I in 2016 we've completely transformed how students can get involved in the running of the Union, making changes to embed student voice at the heart of the organisation, and empowering those from underrepresented groups to have their say. But we're only a few steps into the phase of our transformation, and we know we have lots more work to do.

Some of the big ideas we'll be working on over the next four years include:

- i. Amplify the voice of students, representing them effectively on more key issues that matter to them, ensuring student voice, student insight and student interest is taken into consideration.
- ii. Support and champion the rights of underrepresented groups, helping to create a more equal society and experience for all students from all backgrounds.
- iii. Encourage and facilitate students to discuss and debate important issues in a safe environment, helping them go into the world as more informed and engaged citizens.
- iv. Give students from all areas of the community training and skills to campaign and make positive changes for themselves, giving them the confidence to lead.

C. HOW WILL WE DO THINGS? OUR VALUES.

We've said what we're going to do but we also need to state clearly how we'll go about doing it. Our values dictate the way we operate, the behaviours we champion, and how the organisation should feel.

C1. Student Focused: everything we do will have students at the heart of it. We will listen to what you tell us, provide a platform for your voice, and place you at the centre of our decision making processes. On a daily basis this means we will:

- i. Understand without doubt that we exist to make life better for students, and pro-actively respond to your changing needs.
- ii. Act on feedback to improve the way we work, consistently championing a *you said, we did* approach across the entire organisation.

C2. High Quality: your expectations are high, and we must exceed them. Everything we do should be first class: making the experience you receive second to none. On a daily basis this means we will:

- i. Set key performance standards for all our activities, so all staff and students know what great looks like.
- ii. Evaluate and hold ourselves accountable to delivering these standards.

C3. Inclusive: we will offer a diverse range of activities and services which are fulfilling and accessible for all of you, fostering a sense of mutual respect amongst the student body. On a daily basis this means we will:

- i. Take active steps to ensure more of you from currently under-represented groups can participate in our activities.
- ii. Promote initiatives to create a more diverse organisation that takes account of the broad range of your needs.

C4. Brave: we should be bold and not afraid to challenge the status quo. Big change requires ambition and the ability to see things how they should be, not how they are. On a daily basis this means we will:

- i. Constantly look at our own activities, and ask ourselves the question *can we do it differently and better* at every opportunity.
- ii. Take managed risks to achieve great things, understanding that short term failure is often an essential component of long term success.

C5. Trustworthy: we will ensure that we are transparent, honest and fair in what we say and do, and why we do it. You'll always know we've got your back and are putting your interests first. On a daily basis this means we will:

- i. Regularly communicate what we're doing, answering tough questions honestly and proactively engaging on difficult issues.
- ii. Show respect for each other and different perspectives, particularly when we disagree.

D. HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THESE AIMS? OUR ENABLERS.

We've outlined what we're going to do and how we're going to do it, but we'll only be able to do this if we're an effective organization now and in the future. Since What's Next I in 2016, we've made significant progress in our drive to become a modern, effective charity. We've transformed our physical and digital spaces, rebuilt our finances, increased our charitable spending, rebranded and changed our identity, professionalised our governance, and reorganised our staffing team to better reflect the organisation's purpose. But great organisations don't stand still. There's more work to do. This means we'll need:

D1. Sustainable resources: we've got ambition, which means we always want to do more, which in turn requires more funding. But we also need to recognise that we don't exist in a financial vacuum. We need to work closely with the University to safeguard our long term financial sustainability, clearly demonstrating the value for money we deliver from the funding we receive. This also means implementing financial processes and systems that can support our growth over time.

Our trading operation forms a crucial part of the services we provide students. But we also rely on it as a social enterprise to deliver additional funding for our core membership support and engagement activities. That means we always need to balance the ability to generate a surplus to reinvest, with a requirement to give students maximum value for money. We need to be upfront with students about why this is necessary, and how it works. We also need to actively seek new ways to generate additional funds from other sources, diversifying our risks.

D2. Positive environmental impact: the planet faces a global climate emergency, and as a values-based organisation it's up to us to take a leadership role. We are committed to minimising our environmental impact wherever possible. This means being more thoughtful about what we buy, who we buy from, what we dispose of, and how we treat our physical environment. We are aware that this is not something that we can do alone, so we'll positively engage with initiatives put forward by all our stakeholders, and lobby for positive action wherever possible.

D3. Great people and culture: great organisations are driven by great people. And great people shape great culture. We should ensure the value we place on all our staff and volunteers remains at the forefront of our work through their continuous development and recognition.

D4. Good democracy and governance: we're a complex organization: a Students' Union, part of the University community and a registered charity subject to legislation with which we need to comply. That means we need to ensure our governance is professional, robust and transparent.

But as a democratic organisation we also need to ensure that our members are engaged with the decisions we make. Creating opportunities for students to be as involved as possible in the organisation is central to who we are.

D5. Digital first ambition: we should look to make our systems and services both more efficient and accessible by embracing change. With a change to our student demographic, it will become more difficult for us to physically interact with our members. This means we need to ensure all of our services are accessible online where possible, integrating as much as possible through a single engagement platform. Behind the scenes, we should not be afraid to change our processes in favour of new technology and systems that improve the effectiveness of the organisation.

D6. Effective communication: articulating the work we do, and the impact we have in a clear and understandable way should be central to how we operate. As a membership organisation, we need to understand what students think, and communicate what we're doing through a clear brand. That means we never assume knowledge, and clearly explain why we reach decisions so students always know what is going on.

D7. Comprehensive insight: to be the legitimate voice of students, we need to know them better than anyone else. This means continually conducting high quality research, and using it to inform our decisions. We also need to collate and manage data in a way that allows the organisation to report quickly and comprehensively on our performance.

E. HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE'RE SUCCESSFUL IN 2024? OUR BALANCED SCORECARD.

We need to be able to track our performance to drive improvement, and that means a range of different measures across the organisation that look at both impact and outcomes, from a range of different perspectives.

Mission	To make student life better at Royal Holloway						
	80% of students are satisfied with the Students' Union at Royal Holloway 80% of students agree we have a positive impact on their life at Royal Holloway Achieve national recognition						
Aims	Improve your academic experience	Make campus fun	Look after your wellbeing	Make you more employable	Empower you to change the world around you		
	80% of students agree we have a positive impact on their educational experience 80% of academic reps elected, trained and further engaged to make change in their department 100 positive changes are achieved by academic reps each year	80% of students agree that we provide services, events and activities that are entertaining and fun 80% of students will have attended at least one of our events each year 50% of students are a member of either a student group or student collective 25 new student groups created and supported each year	80% of students agree we have had a positive impact on their general wellbeing, housing or finances 50% of students have engaged with our advice service	80% of students involved in a leadership role through the Students' Union agree we have made them more employable 50% of student leaders in SU roles have engaged with our Student Leadership Academy	80% of students agree we campaign on the issues that affect them and represent them effectively 30% turnout in our elections, 8 candidates per role, 80% of voters cast a ballot over all roles 50 positive changes achieved by students each year (excluding academic reps)		
Values	80% of students associate us with one of our values when asked to describe the organisation in one word 100% of staff can identify and explain at least one value and how it's directly relevant to their role						
Enablers	Sustainable Resources	Positive Environmental Impact	Great People & Culture	Good Democracy & Governance	Digital First Ambition	Effective Communication	Comprehensive Insight
	Appropriate reserves, with a strategic investment fund in place to enable targeted investment Four year funding settlement with a capital refurbishment plan agreed	5 environmental impact reviews conducted on an annual basis into key activities and services 10 positive changes we've made improving our own environmental impact on an annual basis	90% of all staff would positively recommend the SU as a place to work We have achieved national recognition via an appropriate award scheme	80% of students agree they know how we work and how decisions are made	80% of students have engaged with us through our digital platform each year	80% of students agree they're kept well informed about what we do	25% of students complete our annual survey A single performance & engagement index developed and deployed across the organisation