

University of Sydney Union  
Strategic Plan

2022  
2017



## University of Sydney Union Strategic Plan 2017-2020



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## Acknowledgement of Country

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The USU acknowledges the Cadigal People of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land upon which the activities of the USU are conducted. The USU recognises that the land belonging to these peoples was never ceded, given up, bought or sold and the actions the USU takes through its daily routines may always include consultation with community and members of the Aboriginal race when dealing with Indigenous Affairs. We recognise that steps taken to ensure that inclusion and direct consultation with Indigenous students on campus have been put into place but also acknowledge that as students and future leaders of our Nation, we must strive to further improve and reconcile the past and present treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in wide society. The USU stands firm on the view that justice does not come from mere reconciliation, and furthermore the request for land rights for these traditional owners does not come from mere reconciliation, and furthermore that the quest for land rights for these traditional owners is an ongoing battle that is not purely satisfied with Native Title. It is our responsibility as an organisation to continue to pursue the right to manage land by the traditional owners. We Pay our respects to the Aboriginal Elders past and present and extend this acknowledgement to any other Aboriginal people here with us.

# Introduction from the President and CEO of the University Of Sydney Union

**It is with great pride that we present the strategic plan of the University of Sydney Union (USU) for 2017 to 2020.**

This plan is the product of extensive collaboration between the USU Board of Directors, Heads of Department and other senior staff. Together, we have developed a clear vision for the priorities and direction of our organisation over the next four years.

Our 2020 vision is for growth in Australia's oldest and largest student union. This means strengthening our organization's financial and operational capabilities to further develop our offerings as an excellent service-provider, supporter of university communities, and enricher of campus life.

It is the aim of this strategic plan to make the USU more:

Connected – ensuring that our programs, services and spaces connect with, and remain relevant to, our many communities.

Accessible – celebrating and harnessing a diversity of ideas and backgrounds to create an environment of involvement, respect and inclusion.

Dynamic – being open and responsive to ideas, energetic in the pursuit of innovation and nimble in our response to the changing needs of our communities.

This vision for the future of the USU has been prepared with significant awareness of the recent University of Sydney strategic plan. We know that the USU has an important role to play as our University strives to be the best in Australia and a leading institution globally.

Consistent with the strategic vision of the University, we acknowledge our responsibility for the significant amount of learning that occurs outside of the classroom. We remain committed to fostering creativity, leadership, and personal development. Additionally, we recognize our responsibility to encourage inclusion and diversity by supporting the many communities which exist at this University.

We look forward to the opportunities presented by a campus changing in shape, demographics and needs. As our university grows, we must too.

*March 2017*

*Michael Rees.*

**Michael Rees**  
President

*A. Woodward*

**Andrew Woodward**  
CEO

# About Us



The USU is a not-for-profit organisation that has existed to serve the University of Sydney community since 1874 when it began as a humble society for ambitious student debaters.

It is governed by a Board of 13 Directors – 11 elected from and by the membership and two appointed by the University Senate. We are proud to be one of few remaining independent, student-led organisations in Australia.

We provide key programs, services and facilities that enhance campus life for the many thousands who join and interact with us. All income the USU receives is reinvested in our organization for the benefit of current and future members of the University community.

# Who We Are

## OUR VISION

To provide the best university experience in Australia.

## OUR MISSION

The USU celebrates the diversity of our communities and engages with them to deliver inclusive programs, events and services in our safe and welcoming spaces.

## OUR PURPOSE

In recognition of the substantial developments across the campus and in its population over the last four years, the USU has evolved the major focus of this strategic plan from that of providing a 'student experience' to encompass 'campus life'.

The USU recognises that the continued growth of the campus infrastructure and population will require us to meet the needs of more people across more interactions. We have therefore shifted our attention to providing products and services that enable *all* members of the community – students, alumni, staff and visitors – to have a positive and fulfilling campus life.

Importantly, this plan has been informed by the current Strategic Plan of the University, which includes the planned growth in the size of the campus community over the coming years. The USU understands the need to be prepared for this growth and to be aligned with the needs of the new members of the University community.

We strive to develop Australia's most enriching university campus life. We aim to demonstrate relevance and value in everything we do for our community, and provide a world-class experience that extends beyond the classroom.

Although a separate entity, we work in partnership with the University of Sydney to reinforce the University's purpose by creating an environment in which members of our community can thrive and realise their highest potential.

This idea of partnership provides the platform for our approach and creates a framework for our strategic planning. The 2017 – 2020 plan focuses on four priority areas, the first of which is growth.

In order to grow we must be:

- Accessible
- Connected
- Dynamic

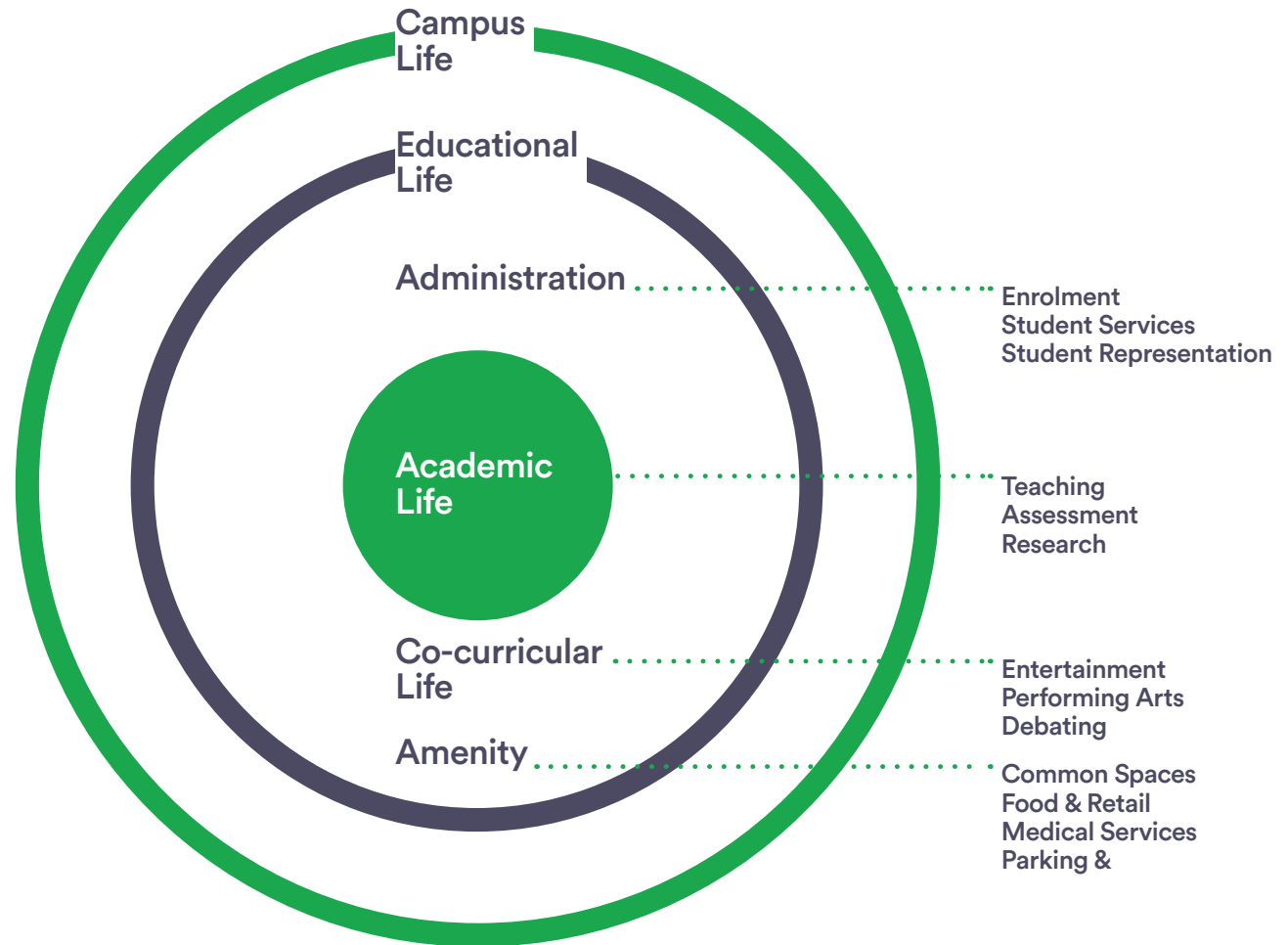
The initiatives outlined in this strategic plan sit within one of the four priority areas and were developed based on their importance and value in fulfilling our organisational aspirations.



# Our Framework

We are passionate in our belief that the value of a university education consists of academic as well as non-academic experiences.

Our framework outlines the role of the USU in fostering campus life and is based on the interaction of a number of essential, co-dependent elements.



# Our Progress

**As the USU moves into the next cycle of strategic planning, it is important to reflect on what we achieved during the life of the 2012 – 2016 Strategic Plan. The following list demonstrates the great strides forward in all aspects of our program and service offering and demonstrates what is possible with clear vision and strong leadership.**

These developments were achieved with the support and collaboration of the University. Strengthening the relationship between the USU and the University has been a high priority over the past four years. Integral to this process was the alignment of the 2012 – 2016 strategic plan with relevant aspects of the University's strategic plan. We are excited about the opportunity to even further enhance the partnership between the USU and the University over the next four years.

In the last four years, the USU has accomplished the following:

- Completed twelve new builds or renovations of our facilities – including our flagship cafes Courtyard and Abercrombie
- Developed a recruitment campaign to increase the skill and quality of our food and beverage staff – we now have the TAG National Barista of the Year on the staff
- Enjoyed a clear focus and direction via our Strategic Plan – remaining consistent to its objectives
- Established and improved working relationships with key departments of the University, including CIS, Student Services, Events, Marketing, Recruitment, Museums and Graduations
- Established and developed the best student entrepreneur program in the country – the award winning Incubate
- Continued to maintain our status as the provider of the best student experience in the country as identified by the National Union of Students
- Won the World University Debating Championships twice and retained the World Number One debating ranking
- Won the Australasian Women's Debating Championships three times
- Expanded our Mandarin debating team – now competing successfully on the world stage
- Continued to provide the biggest and best OWeek in the country
- Rebranded our conference, functions and catering operation – HostCo – and established agreements with external venues
- Participated in University of Sydney Chinese Graduation ceremonies in 2015 and 2016
- Improved accessibility of USU by lowering the ACCESS membership price from \$95 to \$75
- Provided tailored ACCESS membership programs for students with special needs – CET, E12, Indigenous students, refugees
- Established an online publication, Pulp, to replace the monthly print publication, BULL, reflecting the growing need and demand in the community for online content
- Launched a WeChat account to enhance communication with our Chinese-speaking international student community and employed two international students to run it.

## The Pillars of our Strategy

The 2017-2020 Strategic Plan demonstrates a firm commitment to growth. We believe that the best way to achieve this growth is to ensure we are:

- Connected
- Accessible
- Dynamic

**The USU Strategic Direction: To provide the best campus experience in Australia**

# Growth

## Connected

The USU will ensure our programs, services and spaces connect with and remain relevant to our many communities

## Accessible

The USU will celebrate and harness the diversity of ideas and backgrounds in our communities to create an environment of involvement, respect and inclusion

## Dynamic

The USU will be open, responsive to ideas, energetic in the pursuit of innovation, and nimble in our response to the changing needs of our communities

# Growth

The USU will engage in responsible practices that deliver sustainable value to our communities. We are committed to growth through disciplined investment, continuous improvement, operational excellence and innovation.

# 1

## Grow financially to achieve ongoing sustainability.

We will ensure our financial sustainability by developing internal and external income streams to enable us to continue to provide for the growing needs of the communities at our university.

### INITIATIVES

1. Pursue new commercial opportunities, on campus and externally, to expand our financial capacity.
2. Build our financial reserves to ensure we have the ability to pursue large projects while being secure and independent.
3. Engage our alumni network to generate incremental revenue including fundraising, events, scholarships and awards.
4. Pursue greater accountability in all levels of our organisation to improve our ability to incentivise and reward initiatives for income stream growth.
5. Grow the capacities of our organisation by employing excellent staff who add value to our organisation.
6. Develop the capacities of our staff via opportunities for upskilling that recognise excellence and allow all staff to reach their potential.

# 2

## Think big for exponential – as opposed to incremental – growth.

We will think beyond the current limitations of our resources to develop our offering to the university community.

### INITIATIVES

1. Monitor external trends and capitalize on them to expand our programs, services and products and ensure revenue growth.
2. Promote a greater understanding of the appeal of the USU amongst students, staff and other members of the university community to grow our membership.
3. Expand the USU's share of internal markets including campus food and beverage and on campus functions catering.
4. Actively pursue a membership model that ensures our programs, events and services are available to the widest possible range of students.

# 3

## Expand the experiences we offer to ensure that we are responsive to trends and are at the forefront of culture and fun.

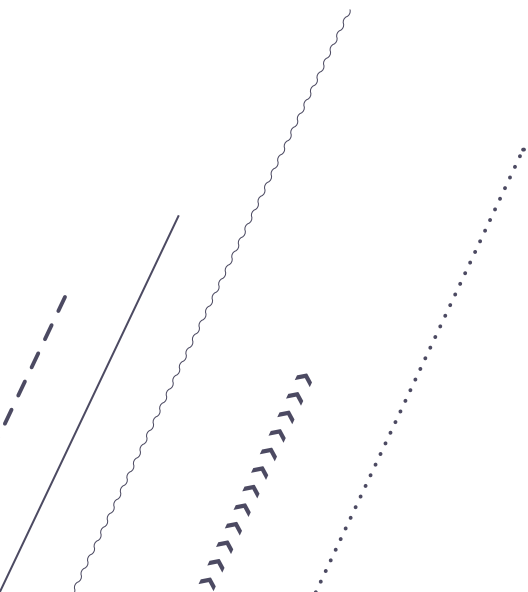
We aim to be expansive in our planning to ensure we provide our communities with a world-class student experience that complements their academic experience.

### INITIATIVES

1. Invest time and resources to maximise enjoyment for our members.
2. Strive to grow the range of experiences that we offer.
3. Remain open and responsive to cultural changes, movements and trends.
4. Research, contribute to and stay abreast of world's-best-practice in student organisation affairs.
5. Be adaptive to any changes to the University's academic and physical environment.

# Connected

The USU will ensure our programs, services and spaces connect with, and remain relevant to, our many communities.



# 4

## **Always be student-led to ensure that student involvement and opportunity are maximized and decisions are guided by student needs.**

We will always be student-led to ensure that student needs remain at the forefront of our activities and decisions. We will create a sense of ownership amongst our members to provide them with influence on the shape and direction of the USU.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. Continue to promote and create student leadership opportunities.
2. Continue to promote and create student employment opportunities.
3. Increase the number of actively engaged students and consult with them as we develop our programs.
4. Review our governance structure in line with developments on campus.

# 5

## **Communicate openly and regularly with our membership.**

We recognize that campus life and co-curricular activities constitute a very important component of many people's experience at university. We will communicate with the many communities at our university to deliver quality services in an open and collaborative way.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. Communicate regularly with our members to understand their requirements and provide offerings that satisfy their needs.
2. Ensure that our work earns, retains and grows the respect of our members and the wider community.
3. While working closely with the University, we will preserve our independence of thought and value the uniqueness of the offerings and experiences we provide.
4. Consider both current and future members when making strategic decisions.
5. Offer our members enriching experiences that foster a lifelong connection to our community.

# 6

## **Be committed to creating in-person and online opportunities for members of diverse backgrounds and outlooks to meet, learn, develop and network.**

We will utilise the latest available technology to enable members to develop relationships and collaborate on projects regardless of time and location.

### **INITIATIVE**

1. Ensure that our Clubs and Societies program promotes engagement between students of different backgrounds to increase cross-cultural understanding.
2. Explore collaborations within the university and with external partners to bring more disparate campus communities together.
3. Broaden our volunteer and humanitarian programs.
4. Develop members' leadership and life skills through improvements in our programs.
5. Foster an environment in which students will find opportunities to network.
6. Develop partnerships that deliver programs and services to members
7. Develop relationships with other campus, national and international student-led and student-focused organisations.
8. Nurture a culture of knowledge exchange between students and USU staff.

# 7

## **Provide appropriate spaces and employ technologies that foster diverse communities and support their goals and evolution.**

We create safe spaces that foster a sense of belonging, cultivate engagement and respond to the needs of our unique communities.

### **INITIATIVE**

1. Provide services and facilities that allow diverse communities to prosper.
2. Employ resources that reflect community interests and enhance campus life.
3. Ensure all new or refurbished spaces are designed to enrich the communities that will use them today, and in the future.



# Accessible

The USU will celebrate and harness the diversity of ideas and backgrounds in our communities to create an environment of involvement, respect and inclusion.

# 8

## Provide an environment and culture in which everyone feels included.

We strive to be inclusive of all members of our community by providing services, support and spaces that are open to all.

### INITIATIVES

1. Consider the safety and mental well-being of our students in all that we do.
2. Actively seek out an array of views and opportunities in considering the USU's services events and activities.
3. The USU is committed to a leadership that reflects the diversity of its membership and we will employ measures to maximise diversity at governance and staffing levels.
4. Provide engaging experiences that appeal to a broad range of students and foster a diverse and inclusive culture.
5. Be equitable in our decision-making, service provision and support for all students.
6. Aim to be transparent and actively involve students in decision-making.

# 9

## Ensure that services, events and activities are accessible to, and take into account the needs of, international students.

The USU acknowledges the diverse challenges faced by our international student communities. We will ensure that we dedicate appropriate resources to these communities in the form of space, services, support and programs to make international students feel welcome and included in university life.

### INITIATIVES

1. Work with international student communities to improve international student engagement through the development of more relevant services and programs.
2. Explore opportunities to increase interaction between international and local students in our programs and events.
3. Continue to develop multi-directional and culturally appropriate communication and consultation channels for international students.

# 10

## **Develop a Disability Action Plan to ensure we foster a culture of inclusion and access.**

The USU supports the University's aim to enable students with disabilities to enjoy a full and enriched campus life. We are therefore committed to providing services, activities and programs that are relevant and accessible to students with disabilities.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. Consult with relevant members of the community to ensure our programs and services are accessible to people with disabilities.
2. Ensure that where practicable all new USU buildings comply with relevant sections of the Building Code for Australia, 2015.
3. Consider Universal Design Principles in all our facilities planning.

# 11

## **Provide meaningful representation of and communication with diverse communities of members.**

We strive to utilise technological and human resources to enhance the communication with the diverse range of groups within our community.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. The USU will use a variety of communication channels to ensure that we are accessible to a range of communities.
2. We will ensure that our messaging through social media and other communications channels reflects the diversity of our communities.
3. Actively engage with minority groups on campus and seeking opportunities to improve their experiences.

# 12

## **Provide a range of products, programs and services that are sustainable, accessible and cater to the diverse needs of our community.**

We aim to provide the community with competitive pricing, quality offerings, diverse products and enjoyable experiences when engaging with our commercial operations.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. Employ a comparative pricing process to ensure that our products and services are financially accessible to members of the university community.
2. Promote healthy lifestyle choices through the provision of our programs, products, services and events.
3. Ensure a consistently high quality of our food and beverage offering and customer service at all of our outlets.
4. Consider the environmental sustainability and ethical implications of our commercial operations.

# Dynamic

USU will be open, responsive to ideas, energetic in the pursuit of innovation, and nimble in our response to the evolving needs of our communities.

# 13

## **Constantly analyse our services and change or discard those that are no longer current or inspiring to our members.**

The USU will regularly review everything we do to ensure that our products, services, programs and events remain relevant to our communities.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. Conduct regular market research to ensure that our offerings remain relevant.
2. Increase the use of pre-event registration and post-event evaluation including surveys and other feedback mechanisms.
3. Empower our members to express their ideas and to realise their potential through their involvement in USU activities and events.

4. Strive to anticipate trends through careful and regular research and consultation.
5. Consider similar organisations and the wider community when developing new services and programs.

# 14

## **Expand our entrepreneurial programs to cater to evolving membership interest.**

The USU will expand our support for student innovation and entrepreneurialism programs and continue to support the development of new ideas.

### **INITIATIVES**

1. In partnership with the University, build a state of the art student entrepreneurs' incubator space.
2. Develop partnerships in Sydney, Australia and abroad, to raise the program's profile and increase donor funding.
3. Explore the idea of an Arts Incubator to help develop the skills and ideas of students preparing for careers in the arts.
4. Continue to support and develop a strong network of entrepreneurs.

# 15

**In order to meet the needs of a dynamic membership, we will review our human and IT resources to ensure efficacy and best practice.**

The USU aims to recruit and retain the best human and IT resources available to deliver best practice services to our membership.

## INITIATIVES

1. Continuously review and invest in our IT and management systems to ensure they meet our needs as an organisation and facilitate the ability to respond quickly to change.
2. Develop a culture of genuine passion and initiative for the work that we do.
3. Continue to streamline our decision-making, implementation and evaluation processes.

# 16

**Develop a positive and supportive staff culture that has as its focus the wellbeing of the members of our diverse communities.**

USU is aware of the challenges staff may face working in this large but concentrated community. We aim to ensure our staff are properly equipped to manage day-to-day interactions with a wide variety of people from diverse cultures.

## INITIATIVES

1. Communicate openly with staff to ensure that we are providing for their needs.
2. Provide appropriate development and training opportunities to better equip staff to meet the needs of our communities including ally training, cultural competency training, and mental health and first aid training.
3. Provide tailored leadership and development training for student staff.
4. Maintain professional training and induction for our Board of Directors.
5. Implement a staff wellness program to improve and promote the well-being of staff.

# 17

**Acknowledge our position of leadership amongst student organisations – both on campus and more widely.**

The USU will continue to push boundaries to cater proactively to this university's changing needs and to provide leadership amongst student organisations.

## INITIATIVES

1. Commit to consulting regularly with the University's other student leadership organisations and with student organisations from other universities.
2. Pursue leadership opportunities with sector related umbrella bodies locally (e.g. the Tertiary Access Group) and internationally (e.g. the Association of College Unions International).

# In partnership with the University

Collaboration with the University remains essential to the quality of programs, services and spaces offered by the USU.

Over the past four years, we have seen the significant benefits of such cooperation in the expansion of the Incubate Program, refurbishment of USU facilities, and growth of the USU International Students' Program.

The University of Sydney's 2016-2020 strategic plan aims to position our University as the best in Australia and a leading institution globally. We understand that the USU has an important role to play in achieving this goal and that collaboration between our two organisations over the next four years is more important than ever.

We believe that the activities of the USU enrich the University's strategic plan in many ways.

## Strategy Four

### Transform the undergraduate curriculum

#### 4.1 Embed new graduate qualities and a new curriculum framework in all undergraduate programs

The USU plays an important role in the learning undergraduate students do outside the classroom. We offer experiences and programs that help students refine their skills as leaders, problem-solvers and communicators.

#### INCUBATE PROGRAM

Our Incubate program provides a fantastic opportunity to embed the University's new graduate qualities in undergraduate students. This program supports students to develop start-up businesses by offering them financial support, development facilities and mentoring. Incubate requires students to identify commercial opportunities, design viable solutions using high-level critical thinking and problem-solving skills and to communicate these ideas to potential customers and investors. Many of our projects also involve students developing their digital literacy to ensure that their products are cutting-edge. Under this strategic plan, we intend to expand our support for student innovation and entrepreneurialism programs to encourage the creation of new ideas and the development of our members.

#### DEBATING PROGRAM

Over the past four years, the USU Debating program has enjoyed enormous international success. With the support of the USU and the Debates Committee, our debaters are able to spend years refining their critical thinking and communication skills. These skills are invaluable in almost any context and complement the academic studies of all involved.



### 4.3 Establish a curriculum development fund to expand learning opportunities for our students

The USU is committed to ensuring that the learning opportunities offered to our students remain broad but relevant to a changing modern world. Although our commitment to learning may not be explicitly academic, the programs and experiences that we offer clearly reinforce the academic skills of participants.

#### STUDENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The University's new graduate qualities are also reinforced by the many student leadership opportunities offered by the USU. Our student Board of Directors, clubs and societies executive members, student festival and activities organisers and volunteer program leaders are provided with unparalleled professional development and leadership experience. These leaders are often confronted with complex logistical, interpersonal, financial, and ethical decisions which enhance both their problem-solving and communication skills. These opportunities equip many students with the skills and experience to become leaders for life. Under this strategic plan, we intend to increase

the training and opportunities offered to student leaders in our organisation.

We are strongly committed under this strategic plan to ensuring that our student leaders have the highest degree of cultural competence and awareness. We understand how important this is to effective local and global leadership and are excited about the prospect of working with the University to ensure that our leaders are culturally competent. We also intend to improve our communication with historically less-engaged student communities to assess whether we might offer leadership and learning opportunities that are more relevant to them.

#### EXPANDING STUDENT MEDIA

Over the past four years, the USU has expanded the variety of student media opportunities which we offer.

We have moved from a print publication in *The Bull* to a completely digital media platform in *PULP*. This new online publication allows students the opportunity to produce modern multimedia content including writing, photography, audio, video and mixed-media. It also allows students to collaborate, edit each other's work and determine the strategic direction of a major campus publication. Over the next four years, we will invest in further production equipment for this publication and ensure that it grows in contributors and readers.

In 2017, the USU launched a WeChat account to improve communication with our Chinese-speaking student community. Although this project is in its early stages, it has enormous potential to engage international students with the campus life and activities of Sydney University. It is also, however, designed to help students learn to produce relevant and interesting content and to offer them the opportunity to edit a major publication. The expansion of this project will receive significant financial support under this strategic plan.

#### VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The USU's volunteering program will grow under this strategic plan to offer more students better opportunities to contribute both on and off campus. This program allows students to apply many of the organisational and event management skills that they may have studied in a supportive learning environment.

Our international experience has shown us the benefit of developing offsite – local, national and international – volunteering opportunities for students. There is a correlation between such activity and improved levels of engagement, academic output and employability. We look forward to working further with the University on widening engagement through volunteering.

#### INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

We strongly support the aspiration of the University to increase inclusion and diversity. We recognise that many international students face social, cultural and linguistic barriers to inclusion in campus life not faced by domestic students. Our partnership with CET has already had a huge impact on international student engagement levels. Over the next four years, we intend to expand funding for our international program to increase the learning and development opportunities that we offer to international students.

We are committed to developing the offering of our International programs in five main areas:

- Expansion and improvement of our Welcome to Sydney International Orientation Program.
- Developing further cultural knowledge sharing opportunities between domestic and international students.
- Increasing the accessibility of our Clubs and Societies program to international students.
- Engaging international students with university life through social media platforms popular in our international student communities.
- Developing events and programs that are of particular interest to international students.

## Strategy Five

### Transform the learning experience

#### 5.1 Develop interactive and collaborative learning designs that foster excellence and innovation

USU programs, events and activities offer a strong focus on interactive, experiential and collaborative learning.

##### CLUBS AND SOCIETIES PROGRAM

The USU Clubs and Societies program is the largest in Australia. Each year, our societies hold hundreds of events with thousands of attendees. This program allows students to learn collaboratively in an amazing array of environments with peers from diverse backgrounds. Some societies have an explicitly educational focus, such as 180 Degrees Consulting which allows students to provide strategic advice to charities, or the Sydney University United Nations Society which develops students' understanding of international relations.

Other societies offer professional development and networking such as the Business and Law societies. Club and society leaders also learn to organise and host events, make strategic decisions and manage finances.

Under this strategic plan, we intend to make major improvements to the USU clubs and societies program. We are aiming to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy to allow students to start new societies more easily and administrate current societies with less complexity. This will allow us to support more innovative student groups on campus. We will also examine the diversity of our clubs and societies program to ensure that all students feel included and people from diverse backgrounds can easily interact within it. This will help to ensure that we are supporting all members of the university community.

#### 5.2 Create contemporary environments that enable flexible and interactive learning

The USU has long been a provider of safe and welcoming spaces at this University. These vary from food and beverage outlets and bars, to areas for relaxation, study, group activities and events. Our spaces – in particular those that cater for students with special needs – provide important co-curricular learning environments for members of the University community.

In order to provide modern outlets, spaces and facilities, we are committed to saving and investing in major new campus infrastructure projects in collaboration with the University. This will require building our financial reserves through strong operational performance and fundraising, as well as designing innovative new campus spaces that improve the efficiency of USU operations.



