

Case Study: **University of Sunderland Students' Union** <http://www.sunderlandsu.co.uk/>



Adding substantial value to students' university experience

University of Sunderland Students' Union (USSU) exists to enhance the experience of its 18,000 members whilst they are studying at their campuses in Sunderland, London and overseas.

The need for support

Like many other students' unions in the UK, USSU recently became an independent charity, appointing Trustees and a new Chief Executive Officer. With the overall ambition to become a thriving 21st century students' union, a new mission and headline strategic objectives were generated and agreed towards the end of 2012. It was also agreed, around this time, to generate a full and comprehensive business plan with a detailed action plan and clear recommendations for organisational change.

What we did

Robert was engaged by the Chief Executive to devise and implement a business planning process. This involved working closely with the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive over a period of nine months, incorporating a whole staff team Away Day, a series of smaller group workshops, remote and one-to-one work with the Chief Executive. Trustees ratified the new four-year business plan in August 2013.

Robert was then reengaged to support implementation, with a particular focus on advocacy and communications, action planning, financial modelling and reporting, team and board development.

What changed as a result

- The new business plan has led to substantial organisational change, including several new staff team and board appointments and numerous new programmes of work.
- USSU is now well placed to fulfil its ambition to become a thriving 21st century students' union.

Keys to success

- Developing a clear understanding of organisational need and matching this with a suitable and appropriate process.
- Being focused, structured, methodical throughout – ensuring key fixed milestones were reached.
- Being flexible in approach, structure and style of delivery, to meet changing needs.
- Adopting a coaching style.
- Being a good critical friend, available when needed, but not afraid to challenge.

Robert was an integral part of the development of our strategic plan. He took a methodical, diligent and pragmatic approach, informed by vast amounts of experience and with a robust theoretical framework behind it. This helped us develop that strategy into workable plans and change we could actually implement. His ordered approach, delivered in a coaching style, resulted in an accessible and very useable Business Plan and associated action plans designed to catalyse and embed change across the organisation. He helped us in the thinking that delivered a full change programme for the organisation. Our mission, vision, values, structure, priorities and culture have all been changed as a result of our work with Robert.

Robert's style, by turns collaborative and coaching, offered me as chief exec exactly the right type and level of support. Our senior team found his approach invaluable in helping set and maintain a clear vision through a challenging re-organisation. His experience and understanding allowed us to progress at a fast enough pace to meet our targets but also allowed enough time for consideration and consolidation. This approach was extended to a workshop for our whole team which proved tremendously valuable.

Marie Nixon, Chief Executive, University of Sunderland Students' Union