

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2026 - 2029



  
Oxford SU

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**Oxford SU**  
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As Oxford SU Presidents, like those who came before us, we are committed to ensuring that student voice is not only heard but acted upon and reflected in meaningful change. This strategy is grounded in collaboration and consultation, and its priorities reflect student feedback, committee discussions, and lessons learnt from the SU Transformation.

The purpose of this strategy is to strengthen the function and foundations of the SU and its strategic and operational direction. The primary object of our charity is 'the advancement of education of students at the University for the public benefit'. This strategy will help us fulfil our charitable aims and continue the important work of the Students' Union to improve our impact and outcomes for students.

Over the next 3 years, the SU will work to strengthen the connections built with University and college stakeholders. We will continue to be led by student voices. This means that our representative structures such as Conference of Common Rooms and support for marginalised student groups remain accessible and amplify our members' voices.

We hope that this strategy will guide the next 3 years of Sabbatical Officers and other student representatives and that it equips them with a well-informed student-led foundation to build upon. This strategy promises that the SU will be a space for representation, inclusivity, and community for all the students that it represents.



Oxford SU exists to ensure that every student, regardless of background, college, or course, can thrive during their time at Oxford. This strategy sets out our collective ambition for a more connected, representative, equitable, and student-led Oxford.

As the only independent, University-wide body led by students, Oxford SU is uniquely placed to bring student voices together, challenge inequity, and work in partnership with the collegiate University using established representative structures, to deliver lasting change.

Over the next 3 years, we commit to transparent, evidence-led and insight-grounded decision-making, and measurable impact, ensuring that students can clearly see how their voices shape priorities and outcomes.

This strategy matters because Oxford's diversity of experiences is both its greatest strength and its greatest challenge. The SU's role is to bridge gaps, remove barriers, and ensure that every student can succeed, belong, and feel represented.

**NIKKI SMITH**  
SU CEO



## Our Roots: History & Purpose

Oxford SU

Oxford SU has evolved as the central, independent representative body within a complex collegiate system. Our purpose is to champion students' interests, amplify their voices, and provide support that complements and strengthens college and University provision.

We are a diverse, student-led charity that strives to be at the heart of the Oxford student experience for every student. The SU's work is democratically led by students, student representatives, and Sabbatical Officers who are supported by a skilled and professional, value-driven staff team.

Oxford SU was founded in 1961 under a very different name, the Oxford University Student Representative Council (OUSRC), which focused on freedom of the press. The OUSRC was formally recognised in 1970 by the University and established its constitution in 1974. This formal recognition came with a name change, and the Representative Council became Oxford University Student Union, or OUSU. From this point, the SU's primary purpose was to provide a central voice for student concerns, coordinate activities across colleges, and advocate for student welfare. In 2017, OUSU rebranded itself as Oxford SU, the name it continues to use today. The SU has, in all its many forms, at its core always existed to serve the needs of the University of Oxford's student body and to represent their voices to central University and college decision-makers.



# Oxford SU's Transformation



In 2025, Oxford SU completed a major organisational transformation, reviewing its role, ways of working, and how we deliver impact for students.

During this period of transformation, the SU undertook a comprehensive review of its structures, services, and ways of working. We re-assessed our organisational priorities to ensure they were aligned with the needs of Oxford's diverse student body, strengthened governance and decision-making processes, and refined how we measure and communicate our impact. We worked to simplify and clarify our core functions, ensuring that our resources and expertise are focused where they add the greatest value to students and student representatives.

We also used this period to listen carefully to students, representatives, partners, and staff to understand what the SU does well and where it must evolve. This engagement shaped a shared understanding of our purpose and the distinctive role the SU plays within the collegiate University. As a result, the SU enters its next phase with a clear strategic direction and renewed confidence in its ability to represent and support students.

These changes have not altered our primary purpose; rather, they have equipped us to pursue it more effectively. With stronger foundations in place, Oxford SU is better equipped to adapt, innovate, and remain a trusted, independent voice for students in the years ahead.

Oxford SU



## OUR MISSION

A yellow curved arrow pointing from the "OUR MISSION" circle to the "OUR VISION" circle.

To empower students to shape their **education, wellbeing, and community**, and to represent them effectively at every level of the collegiate University.

## OUR VISION

A yellow curved arrow pointing from the "OUR VISION" circle back to the "OUR MISSION" circle.

An Oxford where every student feels **represented, supported, heard**, and **able** to thrive.

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## STUDENT-LED

Students are at the **heart** of **everything** we do.

## INCLUSIVE

We work to remove barriers and address inequity in **student experience**.

## COLLABORATIVE

We build **strong partnerships** across the collegiate University.

## INDEPENDENT

We champion **student interests** with **integrity** and **confidence**.

## IMPACT-FOCUSED

We prioritise **meaningful, lasting** change.



This strategy is grounded in extensive student insight gathered through surveys, focus groups, representative feedback, and organisational transformation work. These insights highlighted recurring challenges and, in some cases, disparities, linked to welfare, representation, and sense of belonging, often exacerbated by the complexity of Oxford's collegiate structures.

Through analysis and consultation, 5 strategic themes emerged as the areas where Oxford SU can have the greatest impact over the next 3 years. These themes reflect what matters most to students now and where sustained, University-wide, student-led leadership is required.

## TIMELINE

### CONSULTATION & ANALYSIS

OCT 2023 -  
JUN 2025

01

### STRATEGIC PLAN DRAFTING & REVIEW

SEP 2025 -  
FEB 2026

02

### COLLEGIATE UNIVERSITY STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

MAR 2026 -  
JUN 2026

03

### PLAN LAUNCH

SUMMER  
2026

04



The background is a light gray, stylized map of a city, likely Oxford, with various buildings, streets, and landmarks labeled. A large, dark blue circle is centered over the map. Inside the circle, the text "OUR 5 STRATEGIC THEMES" is written in a bold, sans-serif font. The word "OUR" is in white, "5" is in yellow with a yellow underline, and "STRATEGIC THEMES" is in white. There are two yellow wavy lines on the right side of the circle and two on the bottom left side.

# OUR 5 STRATEGIC THEMES



# STUDENT VOICE

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Student voice is central to a high-quality academic experience. Oxford's collegiate and divisional structures make effective, coordinated representation essential to ensure fairness, consistency, and accessibility. This work must be sustainable and informed by evolving student needs.

## **SUCCESS STATEMENT**

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Student voice is visible, trusted, and effective at every level of the University. Students feel confident that their concerns are heard and acted upon, and student representatives are supported, connected, and empowered to influence decisions and communicate with students transparently about things which impact their educational experience.

## **KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

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- Partnering with divisions and colleges to act as the primary lead for all academic representatives.
- Creating a coordinated system to collect and synthesise student feedback to strengthen decision making.
- Developing meaningful training and reward pathways for student volunteers and elected leaders.



# WELFARE

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Student welfare underpins students' ability to learn, participate, and flourish at Oxford. Academic pressure, cost of living challenges, mental health concerns, and student safety issues continue to shape daily experiences. In a collegiate University system where support can vary, clear, independent, and accessible welfare provision is essential.

## **SUCCESS STATEMENT**

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Students feel safe, supported, and able to balance academic challenges with personal wellbeing. They experience a strong sense of belonging and wellbeing, can navigate existing collegiate University services and know where and when to turn for help. All students can access an independent, holistic, and student-centered Oxford SU Advice service that complements college and University support.

## **KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

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- Expanding the Advice service to include housing advice.
- Equipping students with training and networks, and leading campaigns on mental health and student safety to support wider institutional work.
- Collaborating across the collegiate University to ensure welfare services are coordinated, signposted, inclusive, and accessible.



# COMMUNITY

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Oxford's collegiate structure can feel fragmented, limiting opportunities for connection beyond college boundaries. Building an Oxford-wide sense of community by connecting and supporting our established and vibrant student communities is vital for belonging and engagement.

## **SUCCESS STATEMENT**

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Students feel part of a vibrant, inclusive Oxford-wide community. Connections across colleges and existing student communities are strong, and social, cultural, and extracurricular opportunities are accessible to all.

## **KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

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- Strengthening representation of diverse communities by supporting student representatives, volunteers, and Sabbatical Officers to amplify voices and identify gaps in provision.
- Working with societies and sports clubs to strengthen their role in SU policy, democracy, and the student experience.
- Delivering Freshers' Fair and welcome activities to help students find communities and a sense of belonging.



# EQUITY OF EXPERIENCE

An Oxford education and student experience should not be circumscribed by background, identity, or circumstance. Persistent disparities affect students' lived experiences and opportunities.

## **SUCCESS STATEMENT**

Barriers to participation are identified and dismantled. Students experience Oxford as equitable, inclusive, and accessible, with fair opportunities to succeed and belong, and view the SU as a key stakeholder in this work.

## **KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

- Working with the University to monitor and improve access, participation, and outcomes for marginalised groups. delivering coordinated interventions across both the Access and Participation Plan (APP) and Graduate Access Strategy.
- Undertaking student-led reviews into collegiate University provisions to ensure they are inclusive, accessible, and representative.
- Building on existing University student-centered reviews to ensure the SU contributes to continual improvement and outcomes for students.



# COMMON ROOM SUPPORT

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Common Rooms are central to student life, and their leaders often face significant administrative and welfare responsibilities. Strong, proactive, and targeted SU support enables student leaders and therefore Common Room members to thrive.

## **SUCCESS STATEMENT**

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Common Room leaders feel confident, supported, and connected. Common Rooms operate more effectively, supported by targeted training, tools, and resources, allowing student leaders to focus on building strong, inclusive communities.

## **KEY STRATEGIC ACTIVITIES**

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- Providing comprehensive training, resources, and guidance for Common Room leaders and representatives.
- Leveraging the SU's representative insight and structures to support Common Rooms in their own representative work.
- Reducing the burden on student representatives through consistent and targeted support structures and interventions across shared areas of challenge.

To ensure confidence in our progress, Oxford SU will focus on clear, meaningful evidence of impact rather than on narrow targets. This focused work and evidence of impact will include:

Demonstrable action, interventions, and progress to support confidence, trust in, and a shared understanding of the SU's representative work.

Clear evidence that student concerns are reaching decision-makers and leading to change.

Insight from Oxford SU Advice service data to understand reach and emerging student needs.

Regular feedback and insight from student stakeholders through democratic and representative structures.

Annual student engagement and perception surveys.

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Our work is supported by a set of core organisational enablers that ensure the SU can deliver effectively and sustainably:

## **FINANCE AND COMMERCIAL**

Continuing to ensure our long-term financial stability, supported by the new robust reserves policy and clear risk oversight that enables informed and responsible decision making.

## **PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

Delivering our People and Culture strategy which provides a strong foundation for success, with a focus on supporting elected student officers, empowering volunteers, and continuing to develop a skilled and collaborative professional staff team.

## **GOVERNANCE**

Embedding the outcomes of the comprehensive governance review completed in 2025 that strengthened the role of the Board and clarified structures for oversight, accountability, and strategic leadership.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Developing more effective communication strategies to ensure that students, representatives, and collegiate University partners have a clearer understanding of our priorities, our work, and the impact we deliver.

Together, these measures will help demonstrate that Oxford SU is delivering tangible improvements to students' lives over the lifetime of this strategy.





Oxford SU

