



**Final Audit Report
Glasgow Caledonian
University Students'
Association
November 2012**

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national union of students



1. Assessment Categories Matrix

A1	Participation	Priority Improvement Area
A2	Representation	Priority Improvement Area
A3	Governance	Strong
B1	Vision	Strong
B2	Objectives & Yearly Plans	Strong
B3	Member Focus	Improvement Area
C1	HR Systems	Strong
C2	Targets and indicators	Improvement Area
C3	Roles and responsibilities	Strong
D1	Impact	Good
D2	Reputation	Priority Improvement Area
D3	Services	Improvement Area
E1	Communication	Weak
E2	Finance	Priority Improvement Area
E3	Partnerships	Weak

Assessment Date **09 November 2012**

SUEI Assessor **Ian Robinson**

Award **BRONZE**

2. **Executive Summary**

2.1 Glasgow Caledonian University Students' Association is a well-managed organisation, effectively led and well supported, by a staff team with a sense of common purpose.

The Students' Association has much to be proud of, notably:
NUS Scotland Students' Association of the Year in 2011;
Investors in People Accreditation;
Green Impact Gold Award;
Healthy Working Lives Gold Level Accreditation

The Officers and staff work within a Values framework which guides their behaviours and decision making.

It is evident that SUEI has provided a clear structure and framework for its planning processes and for managing its continuous improvement.

The current work being undertaken within the context of the new Plan should produce clear outcomes over the next 18 months.

The Association should be proud of its **Bronze** accreditation which is a great achievement, especially for an organisation of its size. There is certainly scope to improve on this level in future assessments.

2.2 The Report indicates Assessment Levels for all fifteen Key Lines of which are the principal drivers of the SUEI Model. The Assessment Levels applied are:

Strong
Good
Improvement Area
Priority Improvement Area
Weak

2.3 The Union has 5 KLE areas assessed as **Strong**. These are:

A3 Governance
B1 Vision
B2 Objectives and Yearly Plans
C1 HR Systems
C3 Roles and Responsibilities

The Union has 2 areas assessed as **Weak**. These are:
E1 Communications
E3 Partnerships

It is important that the Students' Association makes immediate efforts to identify action plans to address weaknesses in these areas, as not doing so will affect the future strategic delivery of activities and services to its members.

2.4 The Report also highlights four specific Areas for Action which the Assessor believes the Students' Association should consider as priorities for continuous improvement as this would bring greater benefits in the medium to long term. These areas have been recommended arising from the results of the audit of the fifteen Key Lines of Enquiry which were assessed. These do not negate the need to address the issues raised in the specific comments on each SUEI Theme, which is contained in the main body of the report.

2.5 The four Key Action Areas have been identified as:-

- i) Seek further ways to celebrate and communicate its plans and achievements
- ii) Undertake some longer term financial planning.
- iii) Develop an action plan to increase the number and diversity of voters
- iv) Seek to create more partnerships enabling it to increase, or enhance services for members.

3. **SUEI Process**

The Students' Association has been undertaking continuous improvement within the Model's Themes. In doing this, the Students' Association has liaised with a SUEI Advisor who has offered advice on process and possible outcomes. An Advisor has also visited the Students' Association twice; most recently for a pre audit visit when a list of action plans for final audit was established.

In addition, representatives of the Students' Association have attended a number of SUEI Workshops where good practice and project advice has been discussed.

SUEI Themes

Throughout the SUEI Process, the Students' Association has been undertaking continuous improvement around the following Themes:

THEME A: WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION?

A1. Participation

How does the Students' Association encourage democratic participation with close and regular contact with all sections of its membership?

A2. Representation

How can it be demonstrated that representation is perceived as a key activity that is pursued effectively with desired results?

A3. Governance

How does the Students' Association regularly review its governance structure, roles and responsibilities, decision-making processes and accountability to ensure they are effective and assist in improving outcomes for members?

THEME B: WHAT IS THE STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION AIMING TO ACHIEVE?

B1. Vision

How is the Students' Association forward thinking and innovative in providing a clear long-term vision of its role in satisfying the needs of its membership?

B2. Objectives and Yearly Plans

How does the Students' Association provide specific objectives and comprehensive planning arrangements for all services and activities?

B3. Member Focus

Does the Students' Association have a strong membership focus; identifying their needs and taking appropriate steps to satisfy them?

THEME C: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

C1. HR Systems

How can the Students' Association demonstrate that it has good HR systems reflecting good practice?

C2. Targets and Indicators

Does the Students' Association set specific objectives based on member needs and undertake rigorous performance review and outcome measurement?

C3. Roles and Responsibilities

How has the Students' Association defined the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives and staff to ensure increased outcomes for members and effective political management?

THEME D: ARE THERE QUALITY OUTCOMES?

D1. Impact

Does the Students' Association contribute positively to all its members' time at University and do they appreciate it as a valuable organisation to which they belong?

D2. Reputation

How well regarded is the Students' Association and does it have positive local impact, identifying and using opportunities to influence?

D3. Services

How does the Students' Association provide all its services and activities to meet member needs effectively and efficiently?

THEME E: WHAT UNDERPINS THIS QUALITY?

E1. Communication

How does the Students' Association ensure accurate and timely information is given to members and other stakeholders to promote accountability and transparency?

E2. Finance

Does the Students' Association work within a regularly reviewed medium to long term financial plan with explicit assumptions understood and associated risks assessed? How

does it ensure effective financial scrutiny, budgetary control and compliance with financial regulations and procedures?

E3. Partnerships

How does the Students' Association work to be a good partner regularly considering delivery of current and future services through a range of partnerships?

4. The Final Audit Process

The Final SUEI Audit was based on the following process:

- Longitudinal Benchmarking – evidence collected at the commencement and end of the SUEI process.
- Key Lines of Enquiry Question Evidence.
- Self-Assessment Statements.

A representative sample of the Key Lines of Enquiries from the SUEI Themes was tested by:

- Reviewing Documentary Evidence.
- Consideration and Interrogation of Self-Assessment Statements.

Interviews of:

- Sabbatical Officers
- General Manager
- Staff Members
- Senior University Staff
- Groups of Involved and Non Involved Students

Arising from information submitted and the interviews undertaken during the audit visit the Assessor followed a pre-determined Scoring Matrix. This Scoring Matrix has weighted scoring, giving some evidence higher relevance.

The Assessor's scores and general comments have subsequently been scrutinised by the Students' Union Evaluation Initiative Accreditation Panel who have made the final decision on the level of the award.

5. Key Action Areas Arising from the SUEI Audit

Key Areas for Action

The SUEI Assessment identified four key areas for action, which are essential if the Students' Association is to meet its current and future challenges.

Action Area One – The Students' Association should seek further ways to celebrate and communicate its plans and achievements

- The Students' Association should develop a clear communications strategy to improve its engagement with members and share the successes it achieves more widely. The current framework document requires some significant improvement. The strategy should be developed to support the Objectives of the Big Plan; which reflects how students wish to receive and share information; and promotes member engagement, participation and transparency. Some additional resourcing of this work is likely to be required.
- The Students' Association should look to develop, or to access, a comprehensive membership database and to use this to provide more targeted communications to different segments of the student body. This should be discussed with the University as a matter of priority.
- The Students' Association's current website provider has confirmed that it will be withdrawing from this area of its business. This provides an excellent opportunity to work with a new provider to develop a range of relevant online channels and gain access to an appropriate CRM/CMS system
- The latest Annual Report is well presented but would be improved if it contained a progress report on the strategic objectives and KPI's.
- The Students' Association should undertake regular equality impact assessments to better understand and communicate the impact which its work is having on different student groups.

Action Area Two – The Students' Association should undertake some longer term financial planning

- The following are areas for improvement which need addressing:
 - The Students' Association created a new Plan for 2011-14 using student opinion for the first time. The next iteration of the Plan should build on this foundation and identify further transformational work that will have major impact such as the Student Leaders Programme. Discussions with the University would identify those areas which align to the Institution's Aims and Objectives and which are therefore likely to attract further support.

- The Students' Association does not currently have any long-term financial plans. These are required in order to identify the resources needed to finance the Plan and the risks associated with successfully delivering the Plan.
- The Students' Association should look to strengthen its balance sheet. It has a small net current assets figure and the increase in cash balance for the past year has been generated only through an increase in creditor balance
- The Board should agree a Reserves Policy and a plan setting out how it aims to achieve the Board's objective of building reserves to cover three months running costs
- It is difficult to see how the Students' Association can further develop without additional funding.
- It is advisable to engage University leaders on the Students' Association's vision and aspirations.

<p>Action Area Three – The Students' Association should develop an action plan to increase the number and diversity of voters</p>
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- An action plan should be produced each year to try to increase the number of students voting in the Officer elections (currently 12.7% of the student body) in support of the targets outlined in the Big Plan.
- Particular focus should be put on increasing the number of candidates standing in these elections, as these have significantly reduced since the record high in 2010. Efforts should continue to be made to increase the number of student leadership opportunities within the Students' Association as these provide effective routes into candidacy.
- The Students' Association should undertake a full demographic profiling of those students voting in the elections. This would enable the Students' Association to focus on targeted interventions to encourage engagement from across the full diversity of the student body.
- The Students' Association should communicate more effectively the information which is available about candidates to enable students to make an informed choice about whom they vote for. Students did not feel that information about the candidates was easily accessible or effectively communicated outside of the Students' Association's building/website.

Action Area Four – The Students’ Association should seek to create more partnerships enabling it to increase, or enhance services for members

- The Students’ Association has developed only a limited number of partnerships with other organisations
- As a relatively small organisation there is an opportunity to expand partnership work to maximise the opportunities and services that can be made available for students.
- External benchmarking with charitable and voluntary sector organisations should be undertaken to identify best practice and how to achieve more with less
- Some further discussions with the University should be undertaken to identify opportunities for some further partnership working in the context of the new Strategic Plans being developed by both organisations
- There is scope for further collaboration with other local Students’ Associations especially in areas such as community volunteering and community engagement