

Students' Union Lay Trustee Development

Students' Unions have been appointing non-student trustees to their boards for 20 years, but we don't always support them in the context of our specific sector. They bring excellent perspectives to join the officer and student members but find themselves in a space quite different from the corporate, public or wider charitable sector.

For example, funding is usually tied to the university that the union seeks to improve for students and this may mean conflict with your major funder. The board must ensure democratic validity as well as strategic direction. The elected officer role is both absolutely core and incredibly unusual in how it operates. When coming into a union board many are surprised at the sheer breadth of work it does – a mixture of service provision, advocacy and campaigning work.

Delivered over seven hours and split into two separate sessions, this course helps to demystify the world of students' unions.

Through case studies based on real life and worked examples, lay trustees will be able to prepare for issues within their own unions. Nick will use his experience as well as connections across the SU sector to help lay members understand their context and know what sorts of questions they should be asking on their boards.

Who is this for?

Lay trustees (also known as external or co-opted trustees) who are new to the sector or want to discover more about the world of students' unions.

Course purpose and aims

1. Orientate lay members in the world of students' unions
2. Help them consider their role within the team of their other trustees
3. Understand more about the issues facing the Higher Education Sector
4. Give them tools to support and challenge senior staff members
5. Network with lay members from other unions

What you can expect

- Scenario based conversations to help people consider issues in a real life setting
- Expertise from Nick and others in the specific fields covered over the course, bringing in diverse perspectives
- Presentations on the “why” things have been set up like they have been or why things have changed from past to present
- Opportunities to share experiences and ask questions
- A pre-course survey to feed in your concerns and worries and shape the delivery of content
- Open discussions and the opportunity to try things out. For this reason the main sessions are not recorded.

Session 1 – Understanding the “Student” part of Students’ Unions

Delivered **online** with the option to attend either on Friday 2nd October (2pm to 6pm) or Saturday 3rd October (9am to 1pm)

The history and development of students’ unions

Explaining how students’ union structures got to where they are today. Attendees will have an understanding of the decisions, legislation and events that led to students’ unions looking and operating as they do, including the intended role of lay trustees within them.

Democracy and students’ union boards

Unusually for most organisations, students’ unions are legally required to be democratic and there are decades of practice in our work within this. There’s an important interplay with the work that Trustees do to ensure that democracy isn’t tokenistic but also isn’t trying to do the work legally assigned to the board.

Within the course we’ll explain this dynamic and give you questions to think about in your union about how you should manage it.

The roles of officers and how to support them

Student representation is at the heart of what students’ unions do – it’s what makes us unique compared to other support services. Here we discuss their roles as trustee, employee, leader and learner and what you can do to support them within this and how they interact.

Student activities and volunteering

Like lots of charities, students’ unions use volunteers in their activity, but for them the development of volunteers is a charitable aim. Funding a student newspaper isn’t just about them communicating what we do but them building skills.

With insight provided by [Organised Fun](#), we will talk about this important part of students’ union and board’s role in risk and oversight.

“Nick has guided our non-student trustees through the world of students’ unions with expertise and humour. He’s been able to offer a tailored approach based on different backgrounds & knowledge and explained serious issues without causing unnecessary worry” – Yemi Gbajobi, CEO

Session 2 – Why students’ unions are familiar but different

Delivered **online** with the option to attend either on Friday 9th October (2pm to 6pm) or Saturday 10th October (9am to 1pm)

The University relationship

Your major funder is also the organisation you challenge the most. The fortunes of the university and the union often go hand in hand but you have a duty to expose failings for students in some meetings while building partnerships in others.

We talk about the way the board can support officers and senior leaders in navigating this work and your ambassadorial role.

Staffing in students’ unions

Most students’ unions are characterised by a young and transitional workforce but also one that appreciates the sector’s values and many seek to remain within it (just not a particular union). You’ll be able to think through your duty in ensuring institutional knowledge and the application of policies towards your workforce.

The board has collective responsibility for the support of the CEO and in students’ unions lay members may have a higher level of engagement on this. You’ll be given tools to put this in place.

Campaigners, Providers, Educators and Representatives

The breadth of students’ unions can be staggering – with larger ones providing services that seem unusual for a charity and smaller ones having staff who must pivot from running a social event to dealing with a student welfare issue in a heartbeat. Here we’ll discuss what this means for the trustees and defining your core purpose.

Changes in social provision – Commercial or Community?

Bar sales for students are in decline and have been for a decade but these spaces still provide a space for some students to feel safe and engaged. The changing demographics of the UK higher education sector also means that alcoholic provision may not be of interest and international supermarkets are replacing coffee shops.

In this section we’ll talk about this means for students’ unions with commercial spaces and your discussions at the board.

“Nick has been invaluable to me as lay Trustee at Westminster SU. He’s been there to offer his thoughts on tricky situations, bring me up to speed on areas outside of my expertise and helped the board work cohesively. This course would be brilliant for any new trustee coming into the world of students’ union” – Lay Trustee, UWSU

Optional additional sessions

Session “0” – Trustee Basics

While many lay members of boards come in with a knowledge of what it means to be a trustee, this is not always the case. On Friday 25th September at 3pm I am offering an additional session covering the basic duties of being a trustee and company director including legal requirements and expected behaviours and approaches.

Cost £50 plus VAT per delegate. A recording of this session will also be available.

Session 3 – Being an SU Trustee Chair

Around 1/3rd of all students' union boards are chaired by a lay member. There are some specific challenges here, seeking consensus and bringing together those Trustee board members who are literally in the building every day with those who are by necessity more remote.

Cost £80 plus VAT per delegate.

Costs and sign up

The course cost is £250 per delegate (plus VAT) for the 2 basic sessions. Delegates can attend both on the Friday, the Saturday or a mixture. There are 12 places available on each session allocated on a first come first serve basis.

To sign up use the form below or contact Nick@nicksmithconsulting.org.uk

[Sign up Here](#)