



EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

STRATEGY SUMMARY

2023–2025

About Us

The University of York Students' Union (YUSU) is the representative body for approximately 22,000 students at the University of York. Just over 50 years old and growing rapidly, YUSU provides a wide range of charitable and trading services and activities designed to improve students' lives, create student employment opportunities, and support students to make the most of their time at York.

Our Mission

Our mission is building power and creating connections that break down barriers and enable members to thrive as students and citizens.

Our Organisational Strategy is focussed on the key roles that underpin the work we do here at YUSU. The first is **Building Power**. We believe our role as a Students' Union is to enable student power, support capacity to challenge, and for students to be empowered. We recognise that power, in higher education, is institutionally imbalanced and we aim to provide the space to challenge power inequities. We also believe in equipping our staff with the power to innovate, thrive and excel in an inclusive and supportive environment.

The second role is **Creating Connection**. We believe that our role is to facilitate connections and communities that are diverse and inclusive, and that enhance the University experience. We believe in creating an environment where everyone feels welcome and we champion the power of networking, social groups, events and shared interests in creating community.

Our Beliefs

We have three core beliefs. Firstly, we believe in the **transformative power of education**. Education provides a wealth of knowledge and experience, both academically but also socially and culturally. We also believe in the capacity of people to **build a better society**. Every person has the ability to make a difference and has a vital role to play. Finally, we believe that the role of a union is to **empower, support and challenge**. We seek to support students and staff to create connections, to create inclusive environments and to equip our staff and students with the power to thrive.

Why EDI is Important to Us

We have been taking the initial steps to embed EDI in everything that we do. However, we recognise that this is just a start. Our strategy is a positive statement and practical tool to ensure that YUSU promotes inclusive practices, fosters EDI in all its functions, and challenges the status quo to fulfil our commitment to EDI as a Students' Union and employer, where all are given the opportunity to thrive.

YUSU is committed to creating an inclusive, safe and supportive environment in which individual differences and the contributions of our students, employees, trustees, volunteers and other stakeholders are recognised and valued. We believe that the burden of achieving EDI should not and does not reside on under-represented groups or a single organisational function.

We recognise that structural biases and inequities exist and that experiences and outcomes - for students and staff - are influenced by their backgrounds, as well as their skills, talent and potential. We recognise that the perception exists that an individual's chance to do well depends on irrelevant factors, such as who they are and where they come from, instead of their hard work, skills and talent. We also recognise that inequalities both in society and within the higher education sector are rarely experienced in isolation, but often intersect with other factors such as socio-economic factors and geographical location.

As an organisation, we will not tolerate any form of prejudice, discrimination, harassment, victimisation, abuse, or violence against any individual. Accordingly, we will take a stand against racism, sexism, lgbt+phobia, ableism, discrimination on the grounds of age or faith, and all other forms of prejudice, and we will promote a more inclusive and equal society for all.

We believe that all of our students and staff should feel supported and safe in all that they do. We believe that championing EDI supports better decision making, improves the breadth and understanding of our students and enables the Students' Union to grow and thrive.

Our Commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion - Guiding Principles

We recognise that there is always going to be work to be done to ensure we are an equitable, diverse and inclusive organisation. It is an ongoing process and we will continue to drive, develop and embed our EDI agenda in all that we do.

Every individual at YUSU has a responsibility to drive our EDI agenda, guided by these principles:

- Promote a culture of inclusion, recognise and celebrate difference and champion the benefits achieved by diversity of thought and experience.
- Conduct our work and activities with equity, diversity and inclusion as a priority.
- Support and facilitate students to be empowered, recognise and utilise their own power and to reach their full potential.
- Educate ourselves, students and our community to raise awareness and raise knowledge in all areas relating to equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Challenge behaviour at all levels which goes against these principles and support and enable students and the wider community to do so too.

Organisationally, held accountable by our Board of Trustees, we will:

- Increase the diversity of our staff at all levels, ensure all staff have the opportunity to reach their potential and be equitable in how we manage all elements of our people management.
- Continue to develop and improve an inclusive and supportive culture, where everyone is able to bring their best and authentic selves to work.
- Intentionally and strategically listen, learn, support and empower one another, all staff and all students.
- Embed equality, diversity and inclusion into our leadership, policies, systems, processes, activities and governance.
- Provide learning and training opportunities for our colleagues, students and communities to understand and value equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Take a stand against oppression in all its forms - this behaviour is not acceptable at YUSU.

We recognise that to realise our commitment, there is much work to be done, and while we do not believe the work of making our Union more equitable, inclusive and diverse will be completed at the end of this strategy, we hope to have made tangible progress towards this.

Objectives

The objectives are the pillars of our EDI strategy and the core work areas, these are underpinned by a detailed operational work plan.

Objective 1: Leadership - Lead by example and provide visible leadership on diversity, advancement of equality of opportunity and development of inclusive practice.

We will do this by:

- Publishing our EDI strategy and action plan.
- Working to embed diverse and inclusive practice at YUSU, including the diversity of our senior leadership and Board of Trustees.
- Undertaking external accreditation of our EDI work; we are a Disability Confident Employer and plan to progress to the Level 2, Disability Confident Employer.
- Demonstrating visible leadership to drive forward our strategy.
- Delivering annual EDI reports for our Board and producing summaries of progress made against our EDI Strategy and underpinning action plan.

Objective 2: Culture and Behaviours - Embed a culture that empowers all members of the Student Union's community to achieve their full potential.

We will do this by:

- Evidencing and understanding our organisational culture.
- Strengthening the data we collect and have access to.
- Establishing actions to measure and continue to develop and strengthen a positive and inclusive culture.
- Continuing to review policies and processes through an EDI lens, ensuring inclusive practices that accommodate the needs of staff and members of our community.

Objective 3: Communication and Marketing - Communicate inclusively, honestly and genuinely.

We will do this by:

- Adopting and developing our inclusive communication style, as individuals and as an organisation.
- Using inclusive language and imagery in line with our guiding principles.
- Ensuring our marketing, social media and all other communications will be considerate, innovative and utilise opportunities to communicate and raise awareness on EDI.

Objective 4: Social Responsibility - Be responsible to our communities; applying an EDI approach to development, procurement and social justice.

We will do this by:

- Developing a Corporate Social Responsibility Policy which will guide our responsibilities in areas such as the environment, sustainability, our local community, wellbeing and ethics as an organisation.
- Ensuring that the external providers we work with understand and act in accordance with our commitment to EDI, and that proportionate consideration of EDI is taken in procurement decisions.

Objective 5: Systems, Process and Policy - Systematically apply EDI, recognising intersectionality, to our planning, processes and policy.

We will do this by:

- Driving forward and embedding a Digital Accessibility Framework, ensuring we are compliant with accessibility regulations and current best practice in respect of our websites, online content and working practices.
- The introduction and expansion of the use of Equality Impact Assessments across activities, policies, project development and event management to ensure there are no inadvertent barriers to any individuals or groups.
- Reviewing existing recruitment and induction processes and making changes to the way we advertise, recruit and retain our employees.

- Communicating the importance of EDI during the induction process including specific introductory and mandatory training in EDI, sustainability and digital accessibility.
- Regularly reviewing our training offer to ensure our colleagues are equipped with relevant and best practice EDI knowledge and are provided opportunities to further develop their understanding.
- Making use of people data to guide and evaluate action and performance indicators.

Objective 6: Representation, Student Voice and Activities - Break down barriers, share power and ensure everyone feels that they belong.

We will do this by:

- Developing an EDI toolkit for members; the cultural competencies handbook will help students improve their cultural competence and support the creation of inclusive spaces within the University community.
- Being led by the voices of those who have firsthand and lived experience of inequalities when developing activities and projects.
- Developing our EDI training for our student leaders and utilising feedback and data to ensure our training offering is reflective of best practice.
- Working collaboratively with the University and students to assess and measure the impact of our current projects, such as the Activities Access Grant.
- Continuing EDI work related to our democratic processes and exploring opportunities to increase the diversity of thought and experience of our democratically elected student leaders.
- Ensuring that our events and SU spaces are inclusive and accessible to facilitate participation.
- Developing a sports programme to drive the participation of under-represented groups and communities.
- Undertaking new research to listen to and understand more about the lived experiences of under-represented student groups.

How we will ensure progress

This strategy will be accompanied by an action plan that will identify key actions, resource requirements, timelines, directorate leads and the anticipated measurable outcome. Progress will be reviewed regularly with Trustees and a report will be published annually.