



Elected Officer Induction and ILM Leadership Programme Cardiff University Students' Union, UK

Context and Challenge

Cardiff University Students' Union (CUSU) was established in 1989 as a charity and a trading company. There are 7 Elected Officers who as the Directors and Trustees lead the organisation's strategy. There is also a Senior Management Team (SMT) that manage the organisation on a day to day basis comprising of the CEO and 4 Directors.

Each year a new team of Officers is elected to represent the student body; they have a year to deliver CUSU's strategic aims and pledges. Typically, they bring creativity, energy and dedication to the role, but often little experience of business or leadership. An effective collaboration between Officers and SMT is critical to shared success, although different skillsets, levels of experience and portfolios can make this challenging. The Officers are also thrust into a leadership role, so it is important that their actions and behaviours impact positively on the reputation and results of the organisation.

Required Outcomes

The swift and positive induction and integration of the Elected Officers remains essential to the success of CUSU. The teams only have a year to work together so the acceleration and management of team bonding matters as it is a precursor to defining and delivering results. The induction forms the foundation from which the team works from and becomes collaborative and high performing. It should allow both teams, and the individuals within them, to bring their best to the partnership.

To perform in their new leadership roles the Elected Officers need to define and develop their leadership style, and ensure that their behaviours and decisions are aligned with it. They need the skills to be able to get the best from each other and other key stakeholders. Often the role of the Elected Officer stretches individuals and exposes them to new challenges where their own motivation, resilience and influence are required. They need to feel confident that they have the skills needed to respond effectively in these new leadership positions.

Our Solution and Approach

For 9 consecutive years we have worked with the newly Elected Officer Team and the SMT team to enable shared experiences and a better understanding of how the team functions; to create the foundations for becoming a High Performing Team.

This is run as a 2-3 day residential event for Officers with the SMT joining for selected sessions. The residential covers the following objectives:

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- List the key functional elements of a high performing team
- Identify and maintain ground rules for working together effectively
- Build trust through shared experiences
- Recognise the strengths each team member can contribute to a team; including yourself
- Plan, achieve and actively review team and task performance
- Give and receive feedback to each other
- Critically reflect on performance as a team member and record learning
- Agree a mission and/or vision and shared team values

We underpin the learning with profiling tools including Belbin and Insights Discovery, which allows for a quick analysis of individual and team strengths and development areas. We also use problem solving exercises, to increase both self-awareness and awareness of the team dynamics and to build skills of communication and planning. The energy and pace is high to match the styles of the group with previous challenges including Come Dine With Me, Bake Off, Survival Skills and Pyramid Building.

Later in the year the Elected Officers can complete their ILM level 5 Award in Leadership and Management, to support their role as leaders. This includes the development of skills in leading teams and using a coaching style, which are assessed through reflective assignments that demonstrate the implementation of new skills and ongoing learning.

Results

The residential event accelerates trust, effective communication and ultimately team effectiveness. They learn how to listen to each other, work through differences of opinion and perspective and to agree and commit to a way forward. They know what each other's strengths are and how to best utilise them. This has enabled each respective team to work collaboratively, even under pressure with individual manifestoes to deliver on, and often for the first time in a business environment.

The leadership programme sets clear expectations for the Officers coupled with the skills and personal reflection needed to deliver in this high profile role. The impact of their leadership on the organisation is positive and professional. This ensures they deliver on the needs of both the organisation as a charity and commercial venture and the expectations of the student body they represent. CUSU has achieved the Times Higher Best Companies award, which is testament to this.

Client Feedback

'The Leaderful Action team always bring out the best in our new teams. Their understanding of the team dynamic in our unique structure is excellent. Mix this with their ability to bring out the best in the individuals and how they get the best out of each other gives us a great solid base start the year and to enable the team to perform at their highest level.'

Steve Wilford - Director of Membership Services

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'I can thoroughly recommend Leaderful Action for ILM Leadership courses. Vanessa was an excellent teacher and lead the sessions brilliantly. Moreover, Vanessa is great at facilitating a team building process. This allowed the team I was in to function at an outstanding level and go on to win national awards.'

Rhys Jenkins Vice-President 2015

'I liked the mix of theory and practical tasks and applying theory to actual situations. Completely exceeded my expectations.'

Elliot Howell - President 2014



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