

ROYAL COLLEGE OF ART STUDENTS' UNION

STRATEGIC PLAN



2022-2027

'22-'27 Strategic Plan

RCA STUDENTS' UNION

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INTRODUCTION

An effective Students' Union is uniquely placed to offer opportunities for student leadership, personal development, peer support and an independent voice in students' interests. These activities can be transformational for individual students and the institution they are placed in. This key element of the student experience at the Royal College of Art will be pivotal to strengthen a diverse student community and create opportunities with a lasting and meaningful impact for its members in the coming years.

After a challenging period for students across the UK during the Covid pandemic, life has slowly returned back to campus this past school year and our students are once again able to be part of a lively college community. Still feeling the effects of lockdown, and looking forward to picking up more activities and opportunities for our students again, this is a significant moment to go back to the drawing board and put a strategy in place to ensure the RCASU can do successfully what it has set as its aim: to represent, support and connect its members. The launch of the RCA's new Strategic Plan '22-'27 provides an opportunity for the RCASU to imagine what this can look like at the college holistically, and how our members will be able to make the most of their time at the RCA.

The RCA's commitments in its Strategic Plan 2022-27 to "putting teaching excellence and the student experience at the heart of the institution" and to "work in a positive way with the Students Union" have been warmly welcomed by RCASU. Our members will also welcome the focus of these commitments on "community, campus and inclusive practice" which have been prevalent themes in feedback from students and which feature prominently in the Union's values. A successful Students' Union with a productive, multi-faceted relationship with the College has the potential to significantly enhance the student experience.

Our Students' Union has been through significant changes during 2022. We have recruited a new Director to lead RCASU through its next strategic cycle and are enhancing our permanent staff team with roles deliver improved, direct advice to students, a strong student led commercial offering and administrative backup to the Director and the elected Sabbatical Officers. Our board of trustees have committed to reviewing the infrastructure, resources, and relationships necessary for the Union to

thrive and accelerate reaching its strategic goals. As student numbers grow in accordance with the College's Strategic plan, we will continue to assess our effectiveness, and to take measures to ensure that the Union has the capacity to deliver its ambitions to larger student cohorts.

Based on research with our members, this plan is designed as a guide and framework for this process.



'22 President Adriana Scalisi and Vice President Mary Pedicini

RCASU VISION

We will engage our members in creating an exceptional student experience at the Royal College of Art and help students to achieve their potential.

RCASU VALUES

Independence

Transparency

Equality

Inclusivity

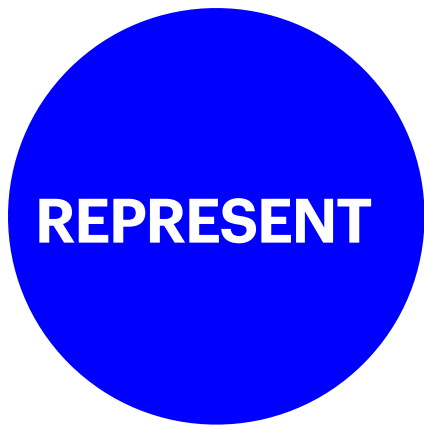
Sustainability

The RCASU recognizes and appreciates the **diversity** of its membership. It remains **independent** of any religious group or political party. The RCASU is committed to work in an **accountable and transparent** manner for its membership. It is committed to **listen** to its membership actively and **represent** their voices to the best of their ability. It pays attention to both short-term and long-term issues.

The RCASU sees its responsibility to **create opportunities** for its members to **build connections** outside the classroom with students across programmes. It aims to identify relevant and diverse issues, interests and activities to provide their members with a wide range of options to get **involved** in the campus life and co-create a **fruitful, critical and lively** environment.

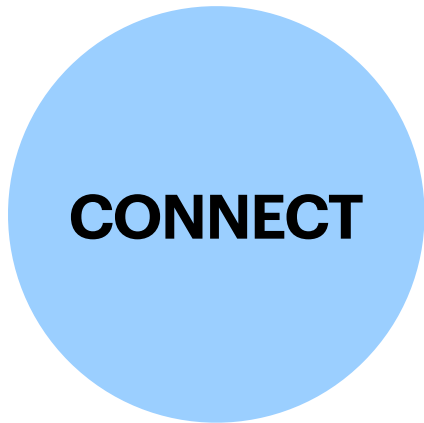
The RCASU's aim is to pursue **equal access and equal opportunity** for present and future students of the RCA. It is aware of the contribution it has to create an atmosphere at the RCA that is an **inviting, generous and safe** environment for its membership.

RCASU STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS



We will ensure that our members' views about their academic, creative and social learning experiences are represented effectively to the RCA.

We will help our members navigate their student journey by providing information, advice, guidance and support.



We will create opportunities for our members to form diverse communities which connect students and enhance their sense of identity.

OUR STRATEGY WILL BE ENABLED BY:

- ◆ **Effective management of all the Union's resources**
- ◆ **Effective communication through better technology**
- ◆ **A commitment to sustainable goals**
- ◆ **Evaluation of progress towards our objectives**

STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS AND OBJECTIVES

WE WILL...

| <p>Ensure that our members' views about their academic, creative and social learning experiences are represented effectively to the RCA.</p> | <p>Help our members navigate their student journey by providing information, advice, guidance and support.</p> | <p>Create opportunities for our members to form diverse communities which connect students and enhance their sense of identity.</p> | <p>Enabling Factors</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Engage with RCA to create effective representative structures which work in the interests of our members.</p> | <p>Provide students with access to advisors who can support them in times of crisis.</p> | <p>Provide physical spaces so that students can form relationships and build communities.</p> | <p>Be a well-managed, well governed organisation ensuring that we use all our resources effectively and efficiently.</p> |
| <p>Become experts in the views and opinions of our members about their academic experience.</p> | <p>Engage with RCA to ensure student procedures are fair, transparent and easy to navigate</p> | <p>Support the growth of student societies and events and the opportunities for personal development that these provide</p> | <p>Use better technology and communications to connect more effectively with our members.</p> |
| <p>Improve training and support for all students with a representative role within RCASU.</p> | <p>Review our welcome for international students, ensuring they have the information they need to enrich their RCA experience.</p> | <p>Provide opportunities for students who study remotely or in a hybrid way to better access our services.</p> | <p>Employ a sustainable approach ensuring an environmental dimension to our decision making.</p> |
| <p>Provide feedback outlining the impact of our representative activity to our members.</p> | <p>Be committed to anti-discriminatory practice in our services and our engagement with RCA.</p> | <p>Provide opportunities for members to connect with alumni and for alumni to maintain a connection with RCASU.</p> | <p>Regularly evaluate progress towards our aims, revising objectives where necessary.</p> |

STRATEGIC COMMITMENT 1:

WE WILL ENSURE THAT OUR MEMBERS' VIEWS ABOUT THEIR ACADEMIC, CREATIVE AND SOCIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES ARE REPRESENTED EFFECTIVELY TO THE RCA.

| Objectives | Activities | Measures | Examples |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Engage with RCA to create effective representative structures which work in the interests of our members | <p>Work with the Director of Student Experience and other RCA colleagues to ensure structures cover key areas of concern and engage student representatives.</p> <p>An issue log will keep track of active and resolved issues</p> | Meetings are regularly attended by 80% of members. Terms of reference are clear. Agreed actions are followed up by all attendees. There is focus on important issues from RCASU survey and Rep feedback e.g. campus hours and the College's digital framework. | SMT/SU committee in addition to SU assemblies and follow up meetings with E&CO, ILTS, and Comms/marketing (College level), School SLT meetings (School level). |
| Become experts in the views and opinions of our members about their academic experience. | Seek quantitative and qualitative feedback through surveys, focus groups and other student engagement. | Student representatives are able to support all planned feedback with evidence. | Annual SU surveys in Term 1 and focus groups in Term 2. Results of both should be recorded to see year on year improvement. |
| Improve training and support for all students with a representative role within RCASU. | Establish in person and online training opportunities for all RCASU representatives. | 70% of representatives engage in training online or in person in year 1. Feedback on quality of training materials. | Reps training on Team Dynamics, Leadership skills, and Time Management skills in Term 1&2. |
| Provide feedback outlining the impact of our representative activity to our members. | Outline any changes made as a result of our representative activity to our members. | RCASU is able to identify areas where its feedback has improved the student experience and will regularly inform members of its impact via termly reports on website. | End of Term report by the SOs dispatched by email, and also on the website. |

STRATEGIC COMMITMENT 2:

WE WILL HELP OUR MEMBERS NAVIGATE THEIR STUDENT JOURNEY BY PROVIDING INFORMATION, ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT.

| Objectives | Activities | Measures | Examples |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>We will provide students with access to advisors who can support them in times of crisis.</p> | <p>We will provide the services of a professional advisor to students in need to cover academic, disciplinary, and student life issues eg housing</p> | <p>Feasibility and scoping of service in Year 1. Number of students accessing the service. Satisfaction scores for the service</p> | <p>Students are accompanied by an advisor at critical procedural meetings.</p> |
| <p>We will engage with RCA to ensure student procedures are fair, transparent and easy to navigate</p> | <p>We will annually review RCA procedures which affect students</p> | <p>RCASU can identify improvements made by RCA because of feedback.</p> | <p>Quantitative measures - how many students came to SU after their issues were not resolved by the RCA, year on year.</p> |
| <p>We will review our welcome for new students with a special focus on international students, ensuring they have the information they need when joining RCA</p> | <p>We will undertake research to establish needs of international students on arrival at RCA</p> | <p>50% of international students engaged in new welcome activities</p> | <p>Again quantitative measure - attendance rates comparison year on year.</p> |
| <p>We will be committed to anti-discriminatory practice in our services and our engagement with RCA</p> | <p>We will compile data on student engagement with our services and will work to close any gaps identified.</p> | <p>Baseline data collected. Regular measurement of engagement by demographic groups shows improvement.</p> | <p>SU inbox monitoring and record the number of complaints/report/follow up comparison, year on year.</p> |

STRATEGIC COMMITMENT 3:

WE WILL CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR MEMBERS TO FORM COMMUNITIES WHICH CONNECT STUDENTS AND ENHANCE THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY.

| Objectives | Activities | Measures | Examples |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>We will provide physical spaces so that students can form relationships and build communities.</p> | <p>We will reopen the Art Bar as a social space for students and staff</p> | <p>Art Bar performance will be measured against the agreed business plan</p> | <p>ArtBar/ ArtHub space in Kensington, possible SU space/ student space in Battersea (currently there is a library space planned in Rausing, this could be SU/ Student space?)</p> |
| <p>We will support the growth of student societies and events and the opportunities for personal development that these provide</p> | <p>We will grow new and existing student societies will be encouraged. RCASU will grow its events programme.</p> | <p>2 new societies are established each year. 10% increase in society members. Increase in number of flagship events and attendance at events.</p> | <p>Society's succession rate year on year.</p> |
| <p>We provide opportunities for students who study remotely or in a hybrid way to better access our services</p> | <p>We will undertake research to establish needs of these students and design activities that meet these needs</p> | <p>Baseline measurement of remote and hybrid student engagement. Targets established for increased engagement.</p> | <p>Better monitoring of the SU inbox as well as improving SU website's "contact us" mechanism. Again comparison of engagement numbers year on year</p> |
| <p>We will provide opportunities for alumni to maintain a connection with RCASU</p> | <p>We will identify opportunities for alumni to engage in activities and influence decision making</p> | <p>Baseline measurement of alumni engagement. Target established for increased engagement.</p> | <p>We will provide opportunities for students to connect to wider RCA communities including alumni, working closely with Generation RCA, DARO, etc.</p> |

ENABLING FACTORS

| Enabling Factor | Activities | Measures | Examples |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Be a well-managed, well governed organisation ensuring that we use all our resources effectively and efficiently.</p> | <p>The Union will review its key policies and ensure that it operates properly within its policy framework.</p> | <p>The Board will publish summaries of its business for its members.</p> | <p>Director reports to a Remuneration Committee on SMART objectives met by Staff.</p> |
| <p>Use better technology and communications to connect more effectively with our members.</p> | <p>Improve website including making full use of the automation of back-office systems. We will explore the feasibility of “single sign on” with RCA., as well as better use of College data to improve student engagement in the SU.</p> | <p>Establish baseline measures for student engagement via website, use site for society management, democratic functions and representative comms. Seek year on year improvements. Segment communications with members.</p> | <p>Website revamping is urgent. Direct link to society website/page instead of just listing society leader email. (This has been a challenge especially with a short life span of the societies)</p> |
| <p>Employ a sustainable approach ensuring an environmental dimension to our decision making</p> | <p>Engage in a sector recognised environmental standard.</p> | <p>Achievement of the standard, seeking higher levels in subsequent years.</p> | <p>Collaboration with SustainLab, choosing sustainable merch, educating students on best practices.</p> |
| <p>Regularly evaluate progress towards our aims, revising objectives where necessary</p> | <p>Board will receive regular reports on strategic implementation from the Director. Annual, accessible reports to members on progress against objectives.</p> | <p>To be assessed via the Director’s SMART objectives and Board engagement in operational planning.</p> | <p>Staff SMART Objectives are clearly linked to the strategic plan.</p> |

CHALLENGES

One-year Master programs: legacy for student societies will be lost, second year students helping first year students will no longer be possible.

Increase in international students: need more guidance to feel welcome and settled in London and a thorough introduction to what a SU is and what services we offer.

SU spaces on campus have been reduced since 2020: where will we host our events and where will there be student spaces (bar, meeting rooms etc.) in Battersea?

More hybrid and remote students: how to make them feel part of the student body and ensure that a hybrid teaching model can support all different learning needs?

OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunities to shape a student body that is engaged, critical, supportive of each other and sustains connections beyond their time at college.

Offering events and societies where students can reflect on their learning journey and actively shape the college.

Facilitating connections with students from other schools and programs.

Offering students a place where everyone feels they can “belong” and are welcome.

Creating a support system in the RCA but independent from the College allowing students to feel secure in filing complaints (no worries about jeopardising grades or academic reputations).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR STRATEGIC PLAN

This strategic plan is intended to be a framework for the development of the Union which will provide continuity and stability during the strategic cycle and provide guidance for the sabbatical officers. It is expected that changing teams of sabbatical officers will have additional priorities derived from their manifesto from time to time.

This draft was developed by the Sabbatical Officers '21-'22 with the input of:

- ◆ the student body through a survey in term 1, 2021 (397 responses online, 71 responses on paper);
- ◆ past SU student surveys 2016-2021, RCA Taught Experience Quality Reports 2019-2017
- ◆ the RCASU board of trustees (29 Sep '21, 23 Nov '21, 18 Jan '22, 6 July '22)
- ◆ the RCASU's permanent staff (1 Feb '22)
- ◆ Anna Mueller and Yon Yi Sohn (sabbatical officers of 2021-22)
- ◆ Student Reps (1 June '22)
- ◆ the RCA Senior Management Team and Head of Student Experience (24 May '22, 16 June '22)

RCASU is grateful to all those who have taken the time to provide their input into the development of the plan.