

# VISION

'Vision' is currently a popular concept – a fashionable term to throw in every now and again, one of those words that makes you feel important if you just say it loudly enough. But having a dream of what or where you want to be, knowing where you're headed, is essential to persuading others to follow. Arising from a deep dissatisfaction with what is and a clear grasp of what could be, vision looks beyond the here and now, beyond your time in leadership, to the future shape of the CU. Vision is vital to leadership. As the final destination it sets the agenda for everything else you plan or do. It is a dream to be pursued relentlessly, a hope that gives you the impetus to keep going and push through problems, a focus to unite around and work together towards in diverse and creative ways, a rallying cry to commit to... Your vision is your real reason for existence.

Cu's exist to inspire and equip students to become passionate lifelong followers of Jesus, a significant aspect of which is bringing the good news in a holistic way to your campus. It can be easy to come up with slogans for the year at CU which are simply Christian clichés or don't actually express the purpose of the CU in a way that can be easily understood. Following are some ideas on forming a statement on the direction your CU is going.

## **forming a vision...**

a *clear picture* of what you, the **leaders** *under God*, see your CU **being** and/or **doing**

Vision is a future picture - so a vision statement describes how you would like the University/CU to be after your year on leadership. In order to be attained, visions need to be pursued, and if we're to pursue them we must see something that we value or want to attain. This wanting to get to where the vision says you're going, a personal identification and agreement with the vision, is ownership of a vision, and is key to its effectiveness. To help you develop a vision you own, we've put together these suggestions.

1. As you start on Committee it would be a good idea to spend time discussing and deciding on your vision for the year. To start with, you might like to give people these questions to think about, reflect on, and pray over. You could ask everyone to do this and come prepared to the next meeting with their thoughts, or allocate a period of time to it during one of your longer meetings.
- Look **within** you: what do you feel?  
What is in your heart for the CU this year? What do you long to see happen?  
Don't try to lead with someone else's vision – allow yourself to dream.
  - Look **behind** you: where have you come from?  
How can you build on what the last Committee were seeking to accomplish?  
What have you learnt from past CU experiences that might shape your vision?  
Having our own vision doesn't mean it has to be totally original!
  - Look **around** you: where are you now?  
What are the CU's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats? (SWOT analysis)  
What resources are available to you? What stage are CU members at?  
Evaluation is important in this situation for two reasons. Firstly, vision arises from a deep dissatisfaction with what is and a clear grasp of what could be – it can't co-exist with complacency; but before you can be dissatisfied with it, you need to know what the current situation is! This also allows our vision to be tailored to our situation. Secondly, visions need in one sense to be realistic. Because they are greater than we are we need others and their resources to help us accomplish them, which means avoiding setting unattainable targets and impossible goals – the people need to be ready. This sometimes means slowing our pace to walk with others (depending on where they are), whilst still giving a lead.
  - Look **ahead** of you: what is the big picture?
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Why does the CU exist and what should it achieve?

Visionaries look beyond their own time to what they desire their group to become.

- Look **above** you: what does God expect of you?  
What does God want you to work towards in CU over the year?  
To bring this in is our highest calling.  
'God's gift to us is our potential. Our gift back to God is what we do with that potential.' (J. C. Maxwell)
- 2. Allow everyone the opportunity to give feedback on these questions, sharing their thoughts, ideas and heart. Make sure that someone takes detailed notes! As you discuss and review this feedback, try to pick out 2-5 key points. (Are there any that came up repeatedly? Any of foundational importance? Etc...)
- 3. Once you have narrowed down your shared dreams to 2-5 core points, decide on two or three people who will work together to weave these into some sort of integrated statement or catchy phrase. This sub-group can then produce a few suggested 'vision statements' for the whole Committee to decide between.

In terms of actually putting your vision into writing, your sub-group will probably find it helpful to try a few different formats: You could try...

- A very 'short & snappy' statement e.g. *Share Jesus, inspire growth.*
- A long and detailed version e.g. *We exist to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, responding to his love by growing in our relationship with him and sharing the good news with fellow students at TCD.*
- Something in between e.g. *We exist to encourage Christians to grow in and share their faith.*  
Using bullet points e.g.  
*UCC CU seeks to inspire a passionate commitment to:*
  - ⇒ *Life-changing prayer and Bible study*
  - ⇒ *The courageous communication of God through who we are and what we do*
  - ⇒ *Building each other up in a welcoming, growing community*
- Starting with your overall aim, following that up with bulleted objectives e.g. *We exist to make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ through...*
  - ⇒ *An unchanging emphasis on bringing our lives in line with the Word of God*
  - ⇒ *A humble reliance on prayer and commitment to community*
  - ⇒ *Clear-sighted and compassionate urgency in our personal and corporate witness.*(Or the overall aim could come at the end e.g. *We seek to encourage... in order to...*)

At the end of the day you may decide that 'mission & discipleship' more than adequately expresses your vision for your CU, or that it simply needs to be 'personalised' (e.g. *QUBCU exists for mission and discipleship.*) or re-expressed (e.g. *To take on our identity as disciples and disciple-makers.*). Or you may have something particular within the broad umbrellas of mission/discipleship that is a particular weakness for your CU currently and which you want to emphasise in your vision statement (e.g. prayer, community, friendship evangelism). Whatever you settle on, do ensure that the words are true to your vision and will be understood by their intended recipients.

**A note on 'mottoes':** A vision is rarely the same thing as a motto. A motto tends to be a watchword for living or a 'rule of conduct', a short sentence or phrase encapsulat-

ing the values or ideals of a group (e.g. 'No guilt in life, no fear in death' or, 'with wisdom and holiness'). Visions tend to be more dynamic, more focussed on the future destination, more of a signpost and catalyst to change (see examples above).

So now you've formed your vision, what do you do with it?

### **using and communicating a vision...**

*dynamite* in the hands of those who **use** it well to **INSPIRE** people, **SHAPE** plans, and **ASSESS** potential & progress; and who **communicate** it in a **COMPELLING** way to those they lead

There's no point having a statement on all your CU publicity and calling it your vision if it's not really what you're about and you're not working towards it. Similarly, even when the whole Committee is passionately committed to their vision, if they haven't got the message across and the rest of the CU don't know where they're going, you won't get very far very fast. So how do we avoid this?

#### **1. USE IT...**

Allow your vision to keep you focused and on track, let it 'keep the main things the main things'. A vision should:

- *inspire* your **perseverance...**

Keep holding onto your vision (even when a right vision is rejected by the majority), going back to it time and again and allowing it to remind you of your dream. This helps you not to lose sight of your destination and to keep the pace in the good times, and gives you the impetus you need to push through problems. As you do this be sure your faith is in God because this, not big ideas, is what sustains us and inspires others. Whilst doing what you can, rely on him to bring his plans to pass.

- *shape* your **plans...**

No matter where you are now, your vision is your destination and you've got to figure out how to get there. Evaluating where you are now puts you on the map – it shows you where you are so that you can work out how to reach your destination. Through the events, teaching and activities etc. that you plan you can equip people for the journey, provide travelling companions and maybe even give milestones along the way.

So decide where you want to get to, work out where you are now, then plan the route. With good planning, everything you do can strategically help you accomplish your vision.

- *prove* your **potential ideas, activities, and progress...**

There are three types of assessment here – of the new, the established and the journey.

- When someone has a new idea about something that the CU could do, ask yourselves: will this contribute to us attaining our vision, will it help us reach our final destination? Your vision becomes the net you use to sieve ideas – only those that 'fit' the vision get through.
  - A fitness test of current CU activities. Take each current CU activity in turn (e.g. main meetings, small groups, international café etc) and ask of each: is this help-
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ing us to attain our vision? This is a way of making sure that you've really thought about what's going on in CU, and you're not just doing things because they've always been done.

- A measurement of progress. Every now and again on the journey it's good to stop, look back and see how far you've come, what helped you to get there, and how far you still have to go. This also gives you the opportunity to revise plans if you need to (and can do), if you got off-track and now want to take a slightly different route to your final destination.

## **2. COMMUNICATE IT...**

We need to envision others by communicating our vision in a way that takes people with us. Here are a few ideas on how:

- Before you start, it might be worth having a think about the CU's current understanding of and commitment to the vision as this may help you to communicate suitably. (Do they have any idea about why the CU exists? Do they have some idea and just need a bit of clarity and definition? Are they already actively pursuing it and just need encouragement and the occasional 'vision re-freshing' session? Do you need to take into account mixed levels of understanding and commitment to the vision? Etc...)
  - As you communicate it, it's helpful to have a pithy and memorable statement that summarises your vision and can be used in explaining it, and on publicity etc.
  - Don't be afraid to keep on about it – cultivate a mindset.
  - Explain the vision, paint the picture for the CU, and tell them where you're going. Make sure you show them the heights of the possibilities, the hope you have in God, the challenges you may encounter in the process, the path you plan to follow and the place where you'll begin. It's also important to put yourself in the picture, showing what part you play, to demonstrate your commitment to the vision and to walking alongside the CU as you seek to reach it together. Finally, be sure to put them and the things they love in the picture – help them to understand the part they play, their contribution to the bigger picture and why it is important to them.
  - There are various means by which you could explain your vision. You could consider conveying your vision at a whole CU business meeting/AGM. Take this opportunity to get them involved by asking for feedback and ideas. Or you could do it in an announcement from the front in a main meeting, or explain it in writing in the CU handbook/newsletter/notice sheet/freshers' info. Use all the opportunities you have to plaster it on CU publicity. You could even dedicate a whole meeting to it early in the year, or do a series of studies on its different parts in small groups... etc.
  - A kind of 'subliminal' way of getting the message across is simply by the events and activities you decide to run. Through these experiences people see you reaching for the vision in practice.
  - Encourage and remind people of the vision by allowing them to see what progress has been made towards attaining it.
  - Aim to get the CU's key leaders and influential members on board so that their commitment to the vision will impact those they lead and influence.
  - Last, but by no means least, undergird it all with prayer, confident that this is what God has for the CU and that he (and he alone) can put it in their hearts.
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## **Scenarios...**

1. Over the last year or so, your notably charismatic CU has experienced some interdenominational tensions that have threatened its unity. However you have seen growth in the area of evangelistic initiatives (you have started running Alpha, and put on a mini-mission) and already have strong worship, prayer and teaching structures.

In light of the above, how would you evaluate the following vision statements?

- *'To grow in love for God and others by digging more deeply into the riches of His Word and plugging into the privilege of prayer.'*
  
  - *'We seek a more radical witness amongst our fellow students through the realisation and practice of our spiritual gifts as we grow up into Christ who is the head of our body.'*
  
  - *'To gather together as Christians from various traditions to meet with the living Lord Jesus, in a unity enriched by our differences. In this setting to grow in grace and truth as disciples and thus be empowered to reach out and impact our college.'*
  
  - *[No vision.]*
  
  - *'We exist primarily for the benefit of our non-members.'*
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2. *Consider which of the following proposed programmes best expresses this vision statement: 'To **bring** people into personal relationship with Christ, to **enable** those who know Jesus to grow in Christian maturity, to **be** a place of fellowship for members of Christ's body, and to **equip** those members for ministry in the college.'*

### **Programme 1**

*Semester 1* – Series on spiritual disciplines in main meetings and an evangelism training weekend away. Small groups study community and get involved in social action. The main evangelistic activity is a weekly coffee bar outside the Student's Union. Weekly prayer meetings are held in addition to a prayer training course and various other prayer activities.

*Semester 2* – Main meetings are seeker-friendly and focussed on the 'I AM' sayings of Jesus from John's gospel. Small groups do a series on Philippians. In addition to a 24/7 prayer event, prayer meetings take place weekly.

### **Programme 2**

*Semester 1* – All the speakers for the main meetings are told about the CU's vision and current state and asked to speak on a topic of their choice, bar monthly 'forums' on hot topics in current affairs. Small groups look at the life of Elijah. Weekly prayer meetings.

*Semester 2* – Main meetings focus on issues from the life of Daniel – persecution, prayer, worship. Small groups run evangelism training and then do 'door to door' work in halls, asking residents for prayer requests & inviting them to an evangelistic event. Weekly prayer meetings.

### **Programme 3**

*Semester 1* – Main meetings cover core Christian basics – knowing and enjoying God, being transformed by God through prayer, Bible study etc., loving others and impacting our world. A 'prayer and praise' night and a 'global vision' night are part of this. Small groups go through the book of Colossians. Weekly prayer meetings, and regular questionnaires in halls.

*Semester 2* – A series in Hebrews takes up most of the main meetings, but there's space for a couple of different 'seeker friendly' events. Small groups look at the gifts God's given and what they're for – how he wants to use all of who he's made us – making sure there are a few very practical weeks included. Prayer meetings weekly. An evangelistic Bible study group is started.

3. *Discuss the pros and cons of each of the following methods of communicating a vision ('To meet with the living Lord Jesus as a united gathering of Christians enriched by our different backgrounds. In this setting to grow in truth and love and thus be empowered to reach out and impact our college.');*

- A. Having formulated the above vision and used it in planning their programme for the year the CU Committee simply pray that the rest of the CU will get behind it. No mention is made of it in any CU/Freshers' publicity, nor in any main CU meeting.
  
  - B. Simon, the CU President, worked as a door-to-door sales rep in his gap year. He uses his expertise to think up various slogans such as 'Get enriched, get empowered' or 'Increase yourself, increase your impact' that get plastered around college in big fonts and bold colours. A page of the Freshers' pack as well as the whole of the first CU meeting is given over to plugging the vision – telling people what they'll get out of it. The main content of the programme is appropriate to the vision.
  
  - C. Just after the Committee have taken over and before the exam period they hold a CU open meeting for all member. After explaining their vision they invite feedback and ideas from those at the meeting, taking these on board to think about and act on over the summer in preparation for the new academic year. In each Committee meeting the President reminds his team of their dreams and destination, and asks someone to pray for the attainment of them. At the end of a lovely long summer the CU handbook is produced, containing a concise presentation and explanation of the vision. Before term kicks off the Committee host a meal for the small group leaders during which they explain the vision to them and the vital part that small groups play in pursuing it. During the first main CU meeting of the year (a freshers' welcome meeting) the vision is mentioned; then in the second meeting a significant slot is given to explaining it to all. The teaching programme is appropriate to the vision.
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