

Undergraduate Education Annual Report

Hi everyone thank you so much for your continued support throughout this academic year it has been a really amazing year and I hope that you all enjoyed it as well 😊 I would especially like to thank all the course, school and faculty reps for your continued support. Without you all I could not do my job so thank you, you've all made a HUGE difference this year (read on if you don't believe me)!

Representation System

July

- I started the year familiarizing myself with the representation structure across the different schools within the university. I benchmarked best practice across other universities to see what facilities and training they offer to their reps. I met regularly with Louise, our Representation Coordinator, to go over our plans for the reps this upcoming year. I attended USI training in Kerry where I went to workshops on representation and went over strategies to strengthen our current systems.
- I reached out to all schools and asked them to nominate a Student Rep Coordinator for the year- this is a new role which gave a direct responsibility to someone in each school to support and enhance the representation system in their school, following Beth's academic rep review last summer.

August

- After benchmarking across other UK universities, I put together a training session for the UG School and Faculty reps. We held it over summer, so the reps knew what their role was before September course rep recruitment. Training lasted four hours and was mostly focused on what the university and SU structures are, what meetings you must attend as a school and faculty rep and what we can do to help them. All 18 reps attended that session or had a one on one sessions with me and Louise.
- I also helped put together a new course rep handbook. This will be used in future for all reps as it is comprehensive handbook of all services, acronyms, meetings and contact points they need to know. This has been put to marketing and will be used in full next September.

- Additionally, I had meetings with many Student Rep Coordinators (SRC) to tell them about their role and what the rep system is. I made a Student Rep Coordinator teams channel for them all to communicate and welcomed Kate McCorry from ESS into the team to help organise and manage the SRCs. We held our first SRC meeting in August to go over the code of practice and what the role involves.

September

- All the officers used Freshers Fair as a way to recruit course reps for the academic year, by talking to multiple students daily about the roles available.
- The schools heavily pushed course rep recruitment this year with the new SRCs being sent marketing materials and promoting them throughout the school.
- As a result of all these efforts, we were successful in securing a 70% increase in course reps this year, our highest ever numbers!
- Training began a week later with Kieran and I facilitating it. We used a modified version of the training used for School and Faculty reps- focusing very much on what the role entails, meetings you must attend, signposting and so on.

October

- We continued training until the end of October in order to allow as many students as possible to attend the in person training.
- We successfully trained over 300 students in person and sent out an online recorded version to all those unable to make the in person training.
- Our first Academic Board was held this month with the new PVC of Education and Students Judy Williams chairing it alongside our SU President Beth.
- This Academic Board was really to get to know our new PVC and talk about general issues concerning students as reps in a more open dialogue than it has ever been held before.
- We were so delighted to see so many school and faculty reps in the room and online both at UG and PG. This really ensured that academic board will be successful and useful for both students and staff in the future.
- I also held my first UG Education Committee with all school and faculty reps which was a casual chat getting to know each other and bringing up any concerns they may have while having some free food!

November

- Myself alongside my faculty reps in AHSS and MHLS were successful at securing a place for all school reps in each faculty at their Faculty Education Committee.
- We held our 'All Rep Induction' in Mandela Hall at the start of the month for all student reps. We wanted the reps to feel like part of a community and give them something back for volunteering their time to become a rep. The event included some free food, balloons, photos and prizes.
- We asked the Director of the SU, Wellbeing, Future Ready, SU Advice, Clubs and Socs alongside our new PVC of Education and Students to give a talk to our reps about their invaluable contribution to the SU and the university, alongside useful information that would help them in their role.
- Over 80 students attended who all received a thank you cupcake on leaving!
- This is the first time we ever held an event like this, and it was only thanks to all the students who turned up and Louise and the SU voice team who were invaluable in helping pull it all together 😊

December

- In December a lot of our school reps held Christmas thank you events around the university for their course reps. These were all amazing events and I tried to attend as many as I could. This is one of the first times our school reps have run events for our course reps, and I want to say a huge well done to our students for putting these together and especially in EPS where the faculty and school reps secured some money to hold events like these to thank their course reps!
- Course rep hoodies were given to students after a randomised draw was held at the start of the month. We are happy to say that most students successfully got a hoodie and hope to give out more later in Spring.
- Kieran and I ran a Christmas event before our students went off on holidays. This included food, drinks, and a quiz. The event was well attended, and we also announced course rep of November and December giving the successful students their prizes.

January

- In January I came back with lots of data from my school reps having gone out in first semester asking them about class tests, lecture recordings, if all their course reps were engaging and dates of their SVCs. I was able to use this throughout second semester to push the university around these issues as you can see later on.
- We held our first official Student Rep Coordinator catch up with Helen Mc Neely as the chair. This three hour session really dug in deep into the rep system

especially in crunch areas like recruitment, training, engagement, and handovers. This was really insightful, and we wrote up a list of actions from this meeting for our enhancing representation project in the Student Voice stream which we hope will continue to strengthen this system going forward.

- We held our first rep event of this semester in the wee bar, the 'Election Run Down'. During this event each officer talked about their role, and I invited our school and faculty reps to talk about their roles too. This was well attended and there was free food and an opportunity for all students to chat to any of us about the elections and our roles.

February

- In February I had my three CAPE meetings in each faculty which I attended alongside my faculty reps. We worked together to go through each school in the faculty and make sure that each school was working to ensure student satisfaction in all areas.
- We also held our second Academic Board which was very well attended by our school and faculty reps. The topic of this academic board was welcome week brought about huge discussions from our reps about their experience (everyone different!) and how they think it should be improved or looked like going forward. This meeting directly impacted on the proposed welcome week paper that we brought forward to ECSU two weeks later.

March

- Throughout first and second semester I was able to go out to some SVCs in schools to get a feel of what students were raising and how they were run in each school. This was really interesting having attended Psychology, CCE, NBE, Biological Science, NAM, HAPP, MAE. Before my term ends I hope to get out to all schools for their SVCs.
- We held our second meeting of Student Rep Coordinators chaired by Helen where Spring course rep recruitment was the heavy focus of the meeting. We are meeting again soon to review training for September.
- Kieran and I started work around a Rep Awards. This has not been held in over five years, so it was important to us that this got off the ground this year. We are delighted that nominations opened just before Easter, and we have 8 categories of awards. The event will take place in the Great Hall on the 24th of April, and we hope it will be a lovely event to give back to all our reps who have done so much for us during this academic year 😊

Strategy 2030

- It was really important to Kieran and I that we were involved in this multimillion pound strategy as it is the way education is moving forward in Queens for the next ten years. We are some of the only members who sit on each of workstream of the strategy which gives us a unique insight into the strategy and allows us to fight for what students want in each workstream. We also know that is very important that students are involved and informed about what is happening in the university. That is why before Christmas we helped hold a joint student and staff information and workshop on Strategy 2030 where student representatives from each school were present and gave loads of feedback on the current projects and ideas on what new projects could be going forward which was so helpful to us and all university staff!

Transforming Assessment

- The main focus of this was to use the Tusla scheme to look further into assessment practices that are used throughout the university- currently this is being piloted in three schools throughout the university. The Digital Toolkit and Digital Champions also come under this stream, and I had the honour of working closely with the student Digital Champions this year- attending workshops and helping them move forward with their hub. I have continued to lobby the Deans in the other two faculties around hiring student Digital Champions in their faculties and hope that this will come into effect ASAP.

Scholarship and scholarly activity

- This workstream has now been turned into a new project- The Institute of Teaching and Learning. I have been informed that students will be fully intertwined in this institute at every level and hope to work further on this during the next few months before its launch in September.

Programme Management Framework

- Kieran and I were heavily involved in helping in the new PMF paper- what constitutes a minor change or a major change. We were consulted on this with the project leads and gave the student perspective on how frustrating it is that it can take up to two years to make a small change- which prevents students from

raising issues as they don't usually get changes and staff from making these changes. This paper was brought to ECQS where it was approved, and workshops were held for all staff to understand the changes. I attended one of the workshops and helped explain how this will really enhance the student experience, I also raised potential concerns around changes and when we need to inform students of changes- eg: when grading of an assignment changes. This was all considered before going into a white paper for approval in the summer.

Digital Transformation in Education

- Kieran and I attended JISC workshops alongside students on Canvas and the different students' experiences with the online platform. This reinforced the need for a minimum standards VLE system- one that this project is trying to implement through this stream. Lecture recording, online resources and AI all come under this stream. Areas that I have worked extensively on this year and support the university in moving forward in these areas.

Programme Development

- One of the key priorities of the union this year was sustainability. Under this strand the university is trying to put together some form of sustainability module. We feel like this should be a compulsory module across all disciplines and talked about this in depth at our Peoples Assembly in January which was well attended by both students and staff. We also brought this to university management before Christmas and continue to work with IT and ESS on in order to implement this. I really hope next year this will continue to be worked on and developed as this is just the start in this area.

Student Voice

- Last September Kieran and I were made co-chairs of the Student Voice Stream alongside Andy Mc Dowel and Helen Mc Neely. This was an important position to secure as future Education Officers will now hold this position too. From this, this strand has developed into a key priority area of the Education Strand of Strategy 2030. Kieran and I brought forward two projects Enhancing academic representation and Student Partnership, see below, which are now some of the main focus areas of the strategy which is so important for student voice and hope will reform student voice and the way it is seen throughout the university.

Enhancing academic representation Project

- We secured this project as part of the strategy in order for the SU and University to work together in order to revamp the representation structure in the university. This includes the introduction of Student Rep Coordinators in each school, a renewal of rep training, community, an education hub, a SVCs and handovers to name a few. See above for a more detailed analysis of what we have achieved so far in this project. Although it has not all been achieved yet this project now has the platform to continue to enhance this area into the next academic year.

Partnership Project

- As co-chair of the student Voice Stream I lobbied the university to ensure that student partnership was a key priority not just in this stream, but throughout the entirety of strategy 2030. This came into effect with the new PVC for education and students joined and decided to revamp the strategy. Alongside the PVC we came up with a partnership project that would run across all streams to ensure students were included in the decision making projects that were affecting them and their future peers. Currently we are undertaking benchmarking across the UK and Ireland on Student partnership and have recruited a new research assistant for this project which I helped select. We hope to have a rough partnership framework put together for a trial implementation in September 2024.

QAA Partnership

In January I was asked to attend a Quality Assurance Agency review workshop at Ulster University after NI approved the QAA to carry out a review on quality assurance in NI this year. During this workshop we talked about how quality assurance was reviewed in FE and HI in NI in the past and what we would like to see in the future. This sparked huge conversations into Student Voice and Partnership and what really is student partnership. I spoke up to DFE during this meeting to ask if the department would fund a partnership review project in NI as this happened in every other nation in the UK several years ago, it just didn't happen here due to the government collapsing (shocker!). I also stepped in for our NUS-USI president as the student speaker on the panel at this event mainly about what students want from their education in regard to quality assurance. After this workshop I brought the NI Partnership review to the NUS-USI president. I am

currently continuing talks with the NUS-USI president around this and hope to get other HI and FEs on board so we can continue to lobby the government around a proper national framework on student partnership.

Academic Affairs and student experience

Lecture recording

- Knowing there was huge work done in this area by my predecessors I really tried to get this over the line during my term. After attending many SVCs I knew that this was still a massive priority for students and staff were still not using lecture capture. At the start of my term, I met with Alana Johnston who works a lot in this area and informed us of the progress so far- Panopto a new system had just been rolled out across campus. On first meeting with the new PVC for education and students I brought this issue up. As she was working behind the scenes I also collected data from my school reps around which schools actually have lecture recording and who doesn't, I was very surprised and disappointed to find huge disparities among schools -even within schools with more opting out than opting in. After talks with the PVC and Alana around this, a lecture capture workshop was set up and facilitated by Dr Emily Nord- an expert in this area. I was asked to get student representation from each school and was pleased to have a student at each table during the workshop. The workshop consisted of students, academic and professional staff, Deans and the unions. This was a very important workshop which allowed us to move forward with putting together a lecture recording policy for the university! Currently this is being worked on and we are meeting with Alana Johnston to see the updates in the next week or so which I am very excited about! Although a proper policy on lecture recording may not be in place by the end of my term, at least we finally have buy in from the university and by this time next year hopefully this issue will (finally) be a thing of the past!

Class tests and assessment

- On the run up to the Christmas assessment period I kept hearing reports from students and my student reps at SVCs on overassessment, deadline bunching and exams masked as class tests. I decided to look into this further, so I went out to each school rep and asked them and/or a course rep in their school to give a run down on their schedule of assessments before Christmas. I was delighted that all my reps had a huge response to this giving me so much data and

testimonials on this subject that it was impossible for the university to ignore. As a result a meeting was set up with the PVC for Education and Students, Maria Lee, the Deans alongside Kieran, Beth and me. During this I presented the testimonials and data from students on what is really happening with assessments in each school in the university and they were shocked with the findings. Maria Lee also gathered data around each assessment that went through QGIS. This meeting was very successful and led to a promise that class tests and over assessing will be properly reviewed throughout the university by Maria Lee's team in ESS (currently this is under way). And a commitment to look into the academic calendar with a direct focus on assessment periods.

Welcome week

- Since I started this role and even my own time at university it was clear that something was missing at the start of the year Welcome week! Students and even staff really missed this element of the academic year when it was removed nearly six years ago. This has caused each school to do their own welcome to Queens which leads to a complete lack of equity of experience for our students. The new PVC for Education and Students appointed a project lead Paula Moran to look into this more. We met with Paula several times throughout the year and brought welcome week as the main topic for our second Academic Board which brought so so many insightful thoughts and ideas to the PVC and us too! As a result, we gathered this information and brought a paper to Education Committee Student Experience in March. Work is still under way in this area and we hope that a small welcome week will be piloted in September 2024 with the expectation that it fully be in place for our 2025 cohort.

The Academic Calendar

- The re-introduction of welcome week and talks around assessment period/periods all led to the academic calendar being brought up in order to facilitate and enhance these areas. Although this is a relatively new piece of work: Beth, Kieran and I, alongside the PVC for Education and Students helped facilitate a workshop of what an ideal academic calendar would look like at academic council at the end of March. This is early days, but I hope to continue talks and work in this area over the next three months.

International Student Support

During Education Committee Student Experience, I spoke out around low degree outcomes particularly for International Students. I addressed the Deans and the PVC for Education and Students that this must be addressed immediately. And as a result, they hired more staff in these schools that have a high intake of international students to provide additional support.

After meeting with the SU Advice team, alongside the Postgraduate Student Officer, we informed that international students were by far the largest demographic subjected to Academic Offences than any other. We worked with SU Advice to develop an Educational and academic offenses awareness day in the run up to exams at the end of April. We also brought issues to the PVC around lack of support and awareness of what are academic offenses here rather than international students home countries. Our president is meeting with the VC to further these discuss issues facing our international students in her monthly meetings.

Increasing Student Engagement

Being fully back and now settled into our new building student engagement has skyrocketed again this year, seeing record numbers enter the building. To ensure we were making the most of this engagement and encouraging more, we put on various events throughout the year, most notably during the Freshers period.

Some of the main events we organised included:

- 'A welcome to Queens Event' held in the Blue Sky room where we had such a big turnout we couldn't hold anymore people in the room!
- Two Creative evenings- one during freshers and one in the run up to Halloween
- The Big Breakfast- where we fed 750 students
- The Big Night In- where we played spiderman, handed over hot food along with candyfloss and popcorn
- RAG Pub Crawl- in partnership with the RAG Chair
- Pride Quiz- where Saj collaborated with Pride Soc
- Seachtain Na Geagile Activities- with dancers and a quiz
- 'Become a Student leader' – which was held in the wee bar on the run up to elections
- Induction talks throughout the university
- Open days- where we introduced and gave an overview of our SU
- 'Welcome to our reps' – in Mandela Hall
- 'Christmas Rep event'- where we had prizes and a quiz

Some events coming up..

- The Rep Awards

- Sustainable Fashion show and loads more...!!

Again, we had HUGE engagement in our Student leader elections reaching our highest ever turn out!

Conclusion

I have absolutely loved working in the Students' Union this year, getting to know so many of you all and being absolutely inspired by all that you do! I want to say a special thanks to the SU Voice team- without you all I would be completely lost! All of my reps and of course my fellow officers, we have had an amazing year together and I can't wait to see what you all get up to in the future 😊

As always, if you have any questions you can get me on su.education@qub.ac.uk (I've not left yet!). Thank you for all of your support this year I really really appreciate it and can't wait to continue my last three months here with you all 😊

Grace ❤️