

# Queen's Students' Union: Full-Time Student Officer Report



## Annual Report (23/24)

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**Role:** Student Officer Welfare

### Introduction

Hello!

Since July, I have represented you as your Welfare Officer and in this report I provide a summary of the work which I have undertaken during that time. Overall, I believe that the past year has been very successful for myself and for the Students' Union more broadly. The University is undergoing a period of great change regarding its approach to student voice which has provided the Officer Team with many unique opportunities (and sometimes barriers) to achieving positive change for students which I believe we have taken full advantage of.

I begin my report by going into detail on the work I have done for my two priority projects: Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI) and Consent Training. Although drug harm reduction was always on the agenda for me, I never expected it to come about the way it did. The plan was for a much smaller campaign to introduce drug testing kits to the Students' Union. However, when the opportunity arose to engage with a comprehensive programme of drug and alcohol harm reduction, I couldn't ignore it and I fought hard for the university to commit to it. The implementation of the DAI programme is probably what I would consider my greatest achievement in this role. I am very aware, however, that the work on it is far from done; this is a two year programme and I am committed to pushing this programme forward until the end of my second term in 2025.

The implementation of consent training as part of the welcome and onboarding experience is another success for the Union and for students. I pushed for consent to be part of that experience and I am so pleased to know that it now will be, but I must continue to work on this to make sure that the training is presented in a way that is the most beneficial to students.

This report then outlines some of the additional projects, protests, events, conferences and trainings that I have been involved with throughout the year.

## Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI) Programme

One of my manifesto promises was to introduce drug testing kits to the Students' Union. I ended up going much further than this and now the Students' Union and University are signed up for a two-year comprehensive drug and alcohol harm reduction programme called Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI). I was made aware of DAI during my first month in the post and I dedicated a lot of my time in that first month, while still getting inducted into the role, to learning more about it.

The programme offered a lot of support and guidance to help us properly implement a harm reduction approach across the whole campus and help to shift the culture around drug and alcohol use. Without the DAI programme this would feel like a near impossible task for me because I started the year with very little expertise on harm reduction. Importantly, DAI broke down harm reduction into a series of key criteria and offered guidance on how to achieve each of them. With monthly support calls, access to a network of universities engaged with the programme, and an annual on-site visit from SOS-UK (who run the programme) I was confident that if we signed up, we would be able to implement effective harm reduction at Queen's.

My task then became persuading the University and Students' Union to sign up to the programme. It was expected to take two years to complete, and a two-year sign up would cost around £16,000. Over the summer I wrote up two proposals, first to the Students' Union and then to the University's Disability and Wellbeing team. While both were supportive of the concept, there was concern over the cost of the programme and how it would be resourced in terms of a project lead. While it was relatively easy to convince the SU that I would be a dedicated project lead for as long as I was in post, the University took some more convincing. Ultimately, it took around five months of lobbying before a full agreement was reached. The Students' Union, Disability and Wellbeing, and Accommodation agreed to each pay for 1/3 of the programme and just before the university closed for Christmas, we officially signed-up to be part of the January intake. Though a September start would have been ideal, I had very much learnt by this point that things in large organisations always take longer than you think, and ultimately, I was just happy to see that we would be engaging with the programme.

During this lobbying period, I took every opportunity I could to learn more about harm reduction so that I would be as ready as possible once the programme began including attending a UMHC Insight Sharing event on the links between mental health and drug use.

Once the DAI programme began in January, I formed a Steering Group consisting of a broad range of staff including staff from the Students' Union, Disability and Wellbeing,

Accommodation, Civic Engagement, Bars and Entertainment, and academics from the Drug and Alcohol Research Network (DARN). The steering group determines the direction of the programme, decides which of the programme's criteria to prioritise and leads on fulfilling those criteria. An essential part of the programme is student engagement, and to reflect this, I also established the Student Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Working Group so that students can feed into the programme at every stage. I lead the Staff Steering Group and Student Working Group and chair monthly meetings of both groups. I also attended the Group Support Day which brought together all partnerships engaged in the DAI programme across the UK to learn more about topics such as: communications, , programme management, education as part of the disciplinary process, naloxone, and measuring culture shift at universities.

It is expected that after Easter, the University and Students' Union will start to publicise that they have signed-up to this programme.

If we complete enough of the criteria after the two-year period, we will receive a nationally recognised accreditation as a harm reduction institution. To achieve this, we need to fulfil a significant proportion of the criteria to a high level. SOS-UK will train a group of students to audit the success of the programme and those students will determine if we earn the accreditation. I may or may not be in post to see that point, but regardless I am confident that we can achieve it and I will continue to work hard to progress us over the next 15 months.

## Consent Training

One of my priorities coming into the job was to implement opt-out consent training as part of the welcome experience so that all students would receive consent training before starting at Queen's (apart from those who may be unable to receive it due to triggers). I did my undergraduate at a university in England where I received consent training in my first week - when I came to Queen's I was shocked that this training didn't take place and I wanted to change that.

This year was both a good and bad time to try and implement this because the university was just starting to undertake a complete restructuring of its welcome and onboarding experience. This meant that there was lots of space to push for consent training to be part of it, and I used this to my advantage, organising meetings with senior management to discuss it and attending as many consultation meetings on the welcome experience as I could to advocate for consent to be part of the experience. At the same time, I felt like I was pushing for an idea that wasn't fully formed and couldn't be fully formed. I knew I wanted this training as part of the welcome experience, but the welcome experience was changing and nobody was 100% sure what it was changing into, so I didn't know where consent training could fit in.

Nevertheless, my insistence of the important of consent training now means that it is on the agenda and will be part of the new welcome and onboarding experience. The details are still being figured out, but I'm no longer fighting for it to be part of the experience –

that will be happening. I'm instead working to make sure that we end up with the best version of the training that we can.

Initially, I planned to inform the content of the consent training through a student survey designed to find gaps in students' knowledge on consent. I worked on this survey for some time, alongside the Consent Ambassadors, developing questions and researching how it could be put out to students. However, ultimately due to the need for ethical approval and tight time constraints, I decided that it was necessary to postpone the survey. This survey was not going to influence whether consent training happened, but rather how it happened and what the content would be. Now the plan is to deliver a form of the survey after the 2024 Freshers period to collect the views of students who undertook the training during that period and use that information to develop the 2025 consent training.

As well as working on consent training, I would meet with the Consent Committee, a group of students who wanted to campaign on issues related to consent. The meetings of this committee led to two motions passing through Council which called for consent, bystander, and handling disclosure training to be given to all QSU and QUB staff as well as all elected student representatives.

I have met regularly with the Consent Ambassadors to discuss their work and share information. This recently developed into the Safe and Healthy Relationships Group which brings together people from across the SU and the University who are working on anything related to student safety and healthy relationships. As part of this group, I manned a Students' Union stand at the Spiking Awareness and Education event where I handed out safety packs and anti-spiking kits to students. I have begun discussions with the SU Bar around providing drink covers in the bar and these discussions will continue over the next 15 months.

## Additional campaigns

- **Improved Student Welcome Experience** – This was a priority for the whole officer team this year. Having had a positive welcome experience at my old university and a relatively negative one when I came to Queen's, I was very keen to put forward my ideas to improve the process. As the university began to completely transform its welcome and onboarding experience, I made sure I was in as many relevant meetings as possible to put forward my perspectives and I helped the Officer Team shape up our proposal for the new welcome experience, which was approved and will be trialled in 2024. This new proposal means that there will be a centralised welcome experience as well as the school-led welcome. I will continue to work with the team on curating the right content for the centralised aspect of the welcome experience.
- **Sexual Health** – I worked with the Operations Manager to promote the outside sexual health organisations Common Youth and SH:24. I facilitated Common Youth providing free on-site STI testing during the Freshers' Fair. In meetings with

the Belfast Trust who run the Sexual Health Clinic in the Students' Union, I have pushed for better communication of services offered.

- **Automatic voter registration** – I have met with relevant university staff to push for the introduction of automatic voter registration for all students registering at Queen's. I have pushed for this to be national policy and co-wrote a policy for NUS-USI Conference which urged the national union to prioritise voter registration drives over the coming months.
- **Decolonise, Demilitarise, Democratised** – following the results of the all-student vote I supported the Officer Team in meeting with senior university management to discuss our asks. I assisted with the editing of the agreement document which was recently finalised. The agreement resulted in significant commitments from the university to develop a new responsible investment policy in consultation with the Students' Union, give students more representation on important committees, and more influence over Chancellor appointments.
- **Housing** – I have started working with the Belfast Housing Co-operative group who are working to introduce student housing co-operatives in the local area which would take the power out of landlord's hands and give students ownership over their own homes.

## Protests

Before I became an officer, my background was in activism. In my view it is very important to continue this aspect of fighting for students when in a Student Officer position. Some of the major protests I have attended this year in my capacity as a Student Officer include:

- Pride 2023 – organised a banner making session
- Reclaim the Night (a protest against violence against women and girls)
- International Women's Day march
- Pro-Choice protests
- Several pro-Palestinian protests - including two directly connected to Queen's. One regarding QUB inviting the CFO of Coca-Cola to campus and the other regarding Thales representatives being invited to campus

## Training/Workshops

Throughout the year I have taken part in a significant number of training sessions and workshops. These included:

- Introductory training including USI's SUT and SUT+ used to orient myself to the new role and make connections with other Unions
- UJS Antisemitism awareness training

- QUB specific training in supporting student mental health as a staff member
- ‘Look After Your Mate’ training
- ‘Ending Violence Against Women and Girls’ workshop hosted by White Ribbon NI
- Media training delivered by Macmillan Media – learned skills for radio and video interviews
- Nexus NI’s Bystander Training workshop

## Events/Conferences

- Attended The World Transformed (TWT) in Liverpool as part of the student union delegation. TWT is an annual ‘festival of ideas’ and political education conference. Sessions I attended covered topics including intersectional feminism, racism and colonialism, the value of mutual aid, Universal Basic Income (UBI), Palestinian resistance to apartheid, and AI in the workplace
- Student Assembly for the Planetary Crisis
- Art in Activism event at the Linen Hall library – reflecting on connections between past and present student activism
- NUS-USI Conference – I participated in policy workshops to determine the policy priorities for our national union. This included the ‘Political Mobilisation and Democratisation’ policy proposal which I co-wrote and presented at the conference.
- In April I will be attending NUS Conference to debate UK-wide national policy

## Conclusion

Over the past 9 months I have had the opportunity to work on so many incredible projects and work with so many amazing people. I could not write this report without thanking my fellow officers, who have been truly incredibly this whole year. I know that no achievement is truly accomplished alone, and I wouldn’t have been able to achieve the contents of this report without them. I am so proud of the work that everyone has accomplished, individually and collectively and I am lucky to consider them all my friends. I could truly thank every SU staff member for their support, but I want to pay particular tribute to the SU Voice team: Damien, Barry, Louise, Anna and Una as well as Christina from the Wellbeing Team for their support both professionally and personally during this sometimes challenging year.

I’ve loved my first year in the Union and I am so grateful to students for trusting in me to represent them for one more year.

With solidarity,

Jess