

Student Officer Annual Business Meeting Report 24/25



Role: Student Officer Equality and Diversity

Name: Suyi Yang

Period covered by report: 2024-2025

Hey everyone,

This year, I've had the absolute honour of being your Equality and Diversity Officer at Queen's Students' Union 2024/25. When I stepped into the role, I knew I wanted to focus on the things that truly matter to me and so many of you. I started by reflecting on my own experiences from the past five years at Queen's, then began meeting with different student groups to have a better understanding of the challenges we're facing together. When I began shaping my priorities, I started with supporting international students and celebrating cultural diversity.

At the same time, I chose to work with the Race Equality Charter at Queen's, which made me realise that campaigning for racial equality needs to go beyond behind-the-scenes work. I pushed for more student-facing initiatives, like interactive stalls and games during Race Equality Week, to help students engage with these important issues more visibly. I still remember students coming up to me and saying they hadn't known Race Equality Week even existed until then, and how much they appreciated learning more about it. Hearing that kind of feedback reminded me that taking these conversations into open spaces really does make a difference.

From there, I continued pushing for greater race and disability inclusion, uplifting women leaders, and standing with our refugee communities. I co-organised more events that not only celebrated these groups but also showed students how their voices are being heard and how they, too, can step into leadership and take control of their own stories.

These priorities guided me throughout the year, and every step of the way, I've been inspired by the passion, strength, and energy of our incredible student community. I've grown more confident in finding my feet as your student officer, and I'm so grateful for the journey we've shared. Now, I would love to take you through my highlights throughout the year.

Key Highlights:

★ Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Throughout the year, I've been committed to embedding Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in everything I do—creating a truly inclusive campus where all students can thrive. This has included organizing events, contributing to university policies, and ensuring student voices are heard.

In Summer 2024, I helped organize Pride celebrations in collaboration with the NUS-USI. We welcomed overseas summer school students at Queen's to participate in Belfast Pride—many of them for the first time.

I led Black History Month programming that celebrated the rich contributions of the Black community at Queen's. Our closing event in the foyer featured traditional African music and food, creating a vibrant space for cultural celebration.

I also worked closely with the Race Equality Charter team. This involved running awareness stalls during Race Equality Week and helping design and analyse the Race Equality Survey for both students and staff.

Recognizing the challenges faced by disabled students, I've been part of the Disability Forum with the EDI department. I've shared insights from the SU's perspective and highlighted new concerns to ensure better support systems are in place.

Additionally, I've participated in the Gift City EDI Task and Finish Group, identifying accessibility and inclusivity needs at the new Gift City campus—addressing everything from physical access to inclusive policy development.

★ International Students

This year, I am incredibly proud to have focused much of my work on supporting international students. What has driven me throughout the year is the desire to help international students feel a true sense of belonging on campus. As an international student myself, I've made this a top priority, sharing my own experiences and creating spaces for others to do the same. From organizing cultural events that celebrate the unique traditions international students bring, to sitting on university committees to amplify their voices, I've worked to ensure international students feel seen and supported.

One of the key highlights has been co-organizing our Chinese New Year (CNY) celebration, which was a large-scale event held in the foyer with great attendance that allowed students and staff from all backgrounds came together to experience this special festival. The event featured dragon dances, Chinese calligraphy, Taiji demonstrations, dumplings, and cultural booths hosted by the Malaysian and Indonesian Student Societies, showcasing how Chinese New Year is celebrated across different

cultures. I also supported the Chinese New Year Gala in collaboration with the Chinese Student Society, which brought together nearly 500 students and staff for an incredible evening. We were honoured to collaborate with the Confucius Institute at Ulster University and welcomed guests including student officers from Ulster Students' Union. For the first time, our officer team was invited by the Malaysian Student Society to join their own CNY dinner, highlighting the vibrant student-led efforts that are enriching campus life.

Beyond events, I've been actively involved in committee meetings across the university. I was invited to the DEIB International Student Support Forum, where I discussed challenges that international students facing in the Business School, including how cultural clustering can reduce engagement. I shared how the Students' Union is supporting international students—through SU Advice and the academic rep system—and how we can embed that support into strategic planning and EDI policies at both the SU and university level.

★ **Women's Leadership**

As a woman in student leadership, I've been passionate about inspiring and supporting other women leaders at Queen's.

This year, I worked with Queen's Gender Initiatives to co-host leadership events and programs for students. I also had the honor of facilitating a women's leadership panel at a global conference, where I joined three students in sharing our leadership journeys and growth.

Looking beyond Queen's, I was involved in the SisterINSPIRE event, speaking to high school girls from Belfast about my path as a student leader. Sharing my story with them was incredibly meaningful, and I hope it inspired the next generation of women leaders.

★ **Sanctuary and Asylum Seekers**

Following the university's announcement to pursue University of Sanctuary recognition, I've been deeply involved in creating a more inclusive campus for asylum seekers and refugee students.

I participated in the Pathway to Sanctuary Committee, representing the Students' Union and advocating for student-focused support. Throughout the year, we saw increased student-led engagement, such as the Student Action for Refugees group.

One highlight was co-hosting a Sanctuary Coffee Morning in winter, celebrating global winter traditions. It was a warm, welcoming event where local communities and students came together to share culture and conversation.

Alongside our Campaigns & Engagement Officer, Saj Khan, I've worked on policy and scholarship consultations to support refugee students. We also gave a presentation outlining the Students' Union's advocacy history as part of Queen's application for University of Sanctuary recognition.

Reflection:

Looking back on this year, I honestly feel so proud and thankful for everything I've experienced as your Equality and Diversity Officer. It's been a year full of amazing connections, meaningful projects, and unforgettable moments of sharing culture and standing in solidarity. Whether it was supporting international students, celebrating diversity, advocating for race and disability inclusion, or uplifting women and refugee communities, what mattered most was seeing just how powerful our student community can be when we come together.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all of you. I truly couldn't have done any of this without your support. Your ideas, energy, and passion for building a brighter future inspired me every single day in this role.

This role has helped me grow so much, both as a leader and as a person, and it's strengthened my commitment to equity and inclusion more than ever. I've learned that real change comes from listening, collaborating, and lifting each other up. Although my term is coming to an end, I'm genuinely excited to see how this important work continues to grow, both within the Students' Union and across the University, as we keep striving to better support every student.

Finally, I just want to say a huge thank you to our amazing SU team. Your encouragement and support have meant the world to me throughout this journey. And a special thank you to our brilliant Voice Team—Damien, Barry, Anna, and Emma. I truly couldn't have done any of this without your tireless support each and every day.

Wishing you all the very best for the future!