

## Students' Union VP Education Report – November 2024

### **Student Council Report – Vice-President Education**

After coming to the post, presidents had 3 away days with Students' Union Staff members to look at our manifesto points and coming up with practical approach to see which of those points were achievable. From that point onwards, we have come up with our objectives from our manifesto points.

I have made notable strides towards my manifesto objectives:

#### **1. Increase the Effectiveness of the Student Rep System**

- **Enhance Student Rep Training:**
  - Improve the content of Student Rep Training.
  - Improve the content of LSR Training.
- **Strengthen Connections:**
  - Improve the connection between all levels of student reps (course reps – LSRs – VP Education).
- **Simplify Reward and Recognition:**
  - Improve and simplify Reward and Recognition for Student Reps to increase participation and document their work at the programme level.

#### **2. Improve the Assessment Experience**

- **Partner with UWE Bristol** to ensure the student voice is included in decision-making, addressing:
  - Assessment bunching.
  - Assessment feedback.
  - Uptake of first attempt assessment.
  - Reasonable Adjustments.

#### **3. Enhance Graduate Employability**

- **Collaborate with the UWE Careers Team:**
  - Evaluate the success of careers in the curriculum
  - Support the dissemination of successful practices to other programmes.

#### **4. Supporting student well-being during assessment periods.**

- Providing information and resources to students at a time of potential pressure.

### **Updates on my objectives:**

#### **1. Increase the Effectiveness of the Student Rep System**



## **Student Rep Structure:**

I have worked alongside The Students' Union Representation Team and UWE Bristol colleagues within Student Voice and Academic Policy, plus UWE staffs, to look at the whole Student Rep structure and make improvements. We have successfully restructured the training for Programme Level Student Reps and Lead School Reps (LSRs). We've also improved and revamped The Student Rep Handbook to provide information, tools and a useful checklist for Student Reps.

- ❖ **Improved Students' Union Induction** - The Students' Union has supported Programme Teams to recruit Student Reps during Starting Block by offering an enhanced Students' Union induction, which will sign up interested students to Rep training. You can watch the induction videos on [our YouTube Channel](#).
- ❖ **Student Rep Training:** Student rep and Lead school rep trainings have been overhauled and piloted with students and staff this summer to improve the confidence, knowledge and skills of Student Reps. All new and returning Student Reps must complete the two-hour training to be added to the Student Rep Database and considered a Student Rep.
- ❖ **Programme Level Student Reps:** Student Reps being recruited through a combination of Students' Union-led inductions during Starting Block and Programme Leader-led elections. The Students' Union has collaborated closely with UWE's Student Voice and Academic Policy Team to inform Programme Leaders and SDLTs about recruitment numbers, targeting specific colleges, schools, and courses.

We focused on areas where the Student Union's NSS score was below 80% to ensure adequate Student Rep numbers, resulting in 1033 Student Reps signing up so far, up from 817 last year. 794 students have completed the improved training and are listed on Blackboard, with follow-ups underway to rebook non-attendees. Training, led by Representation Coordinators, was delivered across Frenchay, Glenside, and Bower campuses with flexible scheduling, including evening, weekend, and two online sessions.

- ❖ We are also identifying courses with January cohorts, reaching out to Programme Leaders to finalize requests by the end of November, with training for January Reps set from 10th to 26th February.
- ❖ **Reward and Recognition:** We have also rebuilt the criteria for recognising different levels of Student Rep engagement. The Students' Union will not be recording Student Reps on HEAR moving forward. We will provide certificates and awards at the Student Experience Awards (May 2025).  
<https://www.thestudentsunion.co.uk/support/studentreps/imastudentrep/rewardandrecognition/>  
We have rebuilt the training and Reward as student reps are so critical, and we need to thank them. We also want to make sure we support Reps to undertake their role and have aligned how we reward them for the essential ways they represent students.

- ❖ **New Student Rep Database** – We implemented a new Student Rep Database for the start of November 2024. Programme Leaders will be able to see their trained Student Reps on Blackboard and students can view their Reps through myUWE.
- ❖ **Lead Student Reps:** Following a second recruitment round, 23 Lead School Reps (LSRs) have been recruited, with eight positions remaining for a final recruitment phase. The revamped training for LSRs includes data sheets on their respective schools from Business Intelligence (BI), with additional support from the Student Voice and Academic Policy Team and SDLT to enhance data understanding in preparation for SBOS meetings.

To date, five LSRs have attended initial training, ten with completed paperwork are scheduled for October training, and eight awaiting HR processing will join training sessions in early November.

**PGR Representation:** I am working with the Director of Doctoral Academy to include PGR representation at the Students' Union Representation Structure. Earlier, we did not have connection with any PGR reps as they were managed by the Doctoral Academy itself. Almost 800 students are pursuing Doctorate degrees including PhD. We're working together to see how we can bring all those PGR reps in our system as their structure is different than ours.

## 2. Improve the Assessment Experience

### **Reasonable Adjustments to Deadline:**

After coming to the post, I was put in a working group during summer to look at the Reasonable Adjustment policy. Throughout this term, I have actively engaged with the university on this matter, raising critical questions (See appendix 1) regarding the assumptions behind these proposals and requesting access to relevant data and analysing it.

The Students' Union is challenged by the sudden changes to reasonable adjustments that have then been implemented by the university prior to the conclusion of reviewing the data and student feedback.

Despite our repeated enquiries, we have not been given the data relating to the recent adjustments. We have been provided with this information, after the change was made. We strongly believe that decisions of this nature must be informed by a thorough analysis of the data to ensure that the root causes of the issues are identified and addressed effectively. Without proper engagement and transparency, it is difficult to support changes that may significantly impact students. We stand by our initial position that analysing the data and working collaboratively to find sustainable solutions is essential. Our questions regarding the reasonable adjustments remain unresolved

## **Appendix 1**

### **Advocacy for Fair and Flexible Extensions**

1. Flexibility in Self -Certification: We opposed limiting self -certifications to two per year, suggesting a more flexible approach for students with ongoing conditions, allowing exceptions based on individual circumstances and raised concerns about Equity and Accessibility
2. Framework Options and Staff Capacity: We questioned the feasibility of multiple RA options (48 hours, 5 days, 14 days, 28 days) and suggested a streamlined process to reduce the burden on staff and students.
3. 5 -Day Self -Certification: We recommended clarifying if the 5 -day extension is based on working or calendar days to avoid ambiguity.
4. Inclusivity for Disabled Students: We raised concerns about requiring conversations for additional RA beyond initial self -certifications, advocating for a simpler, possibly online, declaration process to reduce barriers.
5. Data transparency: We requested detailed data on RA applications to understand trends and address potential abuse.
6. Evidence Requirements: We highlighted issues with requiring evidence for extensions beyond two self -certifications, suggesting a balanced approach to support genuine cases without excessive bureaucracy.
7. Communication Planning: We requested involvement in the communication plan to ensure effective dissemination of RA policy changes.
8. Proactive Support Measures: We proposed anticipatory adjustments to reduce the administrative burden on students and enhance their academic experience.
9. Responsive Policy Framework: We advocated for flexible policies that accommodate exceptional circumstances, ensuring inclusivity and adaptability to diverse student needs.
10. Collaborative Decision -Making: We emphasised involving The Students' Union and student body in policy changes to reflect the collective student voice through thorough consultation.
11. Over-Burdening Disabled Students: We highlighted the negative impact of requiring continuous justification from disabled students for RA, advocating for a streamlined, respectful process.
12. Championing Student Welfare: We ensured that proposed changes support students' mental and physical health, cautioning against overly restrictive policies that could harm student wellbeing.

### **Questioning 5 -Day Limit**

13. Extension Duration: We questioned the rationale behind the 5 -day limit.

### **Representation in Academic Board:**

At the October Academic Board, the SU President and I raised critical concerns regarding recent changes made without adequate student consultation, which goes against the Principles of Academic Representation agreed upon in 2020. We highlighted that these decisions were made without fully understanding the underlying issues or the scope of impact on students, as data on the number of affected students was not analyzed before implementation. While only the number of applications was considered, key information was missing, such as the count of formally registered disabled students who previously applied for Reasonable Adjustments (RAs) and the proportion of assignments for each student that required applications. Additionally, there was no detailed

breakdown of RA applications per student, which would have offered a clearer understanding of individual needs.

My statements during Academic Board:

- Firstly, for students who are formally registered as disabled and protected under the Equality Act, we need to ask why their standard extension time has been reduced by 50%. What is the legal reason for this change? It's important that any decision affecting disabled students is backed by a proper legal justification, especially when it involves reducing the support they are entitled to.
- Secondly, for students who meet the definition of disabled but are not formally registered with the university, we should be asking why they haven't disclosed their disability. The goal should be to close the gap between students who are registered and those who are not, so they can access the support they need.
- Thirdly, there are students who don't meet the formal definition of disabled or qualify for protections under the Equality Act but have been using the extension process. In these cases, we need to explore why they are seeking extensions. Are they struggling due to over-assessment or bunching or other issues that we haven't fully understood? Identifying the root cause of their difficulties will help us better support all students.
- For students who are successfully registered as a disabled student, it is not at all clear why they are having to apply for an extension on each assessment - this puts them at a disadvantage in perception and process terms. RA should be automatically included in their assessment.

This shows the matter at hand is extremely sensitive and serious and needs more time to make any decision. Our main concern is that without proper data analysis, we should not make further decisions. As from conversations from the working group indicated even restrictive rules for RA. For example, it was two self certs per year and 3 extra days+ 48 hours, making it 5 days. We should not do anything which would hamper students before consulting with students.

I know we are planning to look at the matter through UWE Programmes, but because of the seriousness of this issue, we suggest opening the discussion again and forming a group to do that and include the EDI team and any other relevant teams.

Moreover, we asked whether UWE has done the Equality Impact Assessment or not. We mentioned that we will be sending our surveys to students to get feedback from students about the impact of this decision.

### **The outcome of Academic Board for RA to Deadline**

The academic board agreed to form the **task and finish** group to review the new policy. This group would comprise of the previous working group who worked for the new reasonable

adjustment policy and Students' Union could suggest any relevant teams to be part of the group.

**Previous working group:** Deputy Registrar, Three Deans of Learning and Teaching (CHSS, CBAL, CATE), InfoPoint team manager, Disability services, Student advise team manager, Deputy director of Student life service, Head of Student Communication, Students' Union.

After the Academic Board decision, I have suggested some relevant teams to be included in the meeting. For example:

- EDI team – *To enable feedback on the inclusion and Equality Impact assessment on the change*
- Legal Governance Services at UWE (or any legal team that is relevant) – *to ensure that the changes do not breach any legal compliance requirements eg Equality Act*
- Wellbeing Team – *to ensure that the individual impact of changes is considered and the level of support available is available/managed*
- Data and Business intelligence (BI) team – *to ensure questions on analysis and evidence can be interrogated accurately and in line with the groups requests*
- Representation from Post graduate research – *There is feedback in the survey that is from PGT and PGR so will also need to have their specific input*
- Care leavers & Young carer support team – *A large section of RA's to deadline have been attributed to caring responsibilities so this group of support staff will have invaluable insight into this*
- If UWE has a TEL or eLearning team, they could assist in exploring digital solutions that might support or streamline reasonable adjustments, especially for online submissions or time-sensitive support needs.
- Disability Officer (PTO)
- Three Su Presidents
- Students who were impacted by the recent RA policy

The first meeting of this Task and Finish Group is scheduled on 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2024.

### **Students' Union Survey on RA:**

From October, we started surveying students whether they've been impacted by this decision or not to get more student feedback. We can then use this feedback in the Task and finish group. At the moment, we've received around 400 responses from students and we're targeting at least 500 responses. Therefore, we extended the deadline till 11<sup>th</sup> of November.

### **Delayed feedback**

In my presentation on tackling delayed assessment feedback, I shared why this issue was one of my key manifesto promises as VP Education.

Because it's a major student concern affecting confidence, planning, and academic performance.

I showed 3 years of survey data, like the NSS results where UWE's feedback timeliness scored 6% below the sector average (2023), and shared student feedback highlighting the impact of delayed responses, such as hesitancy with new assignments and increased reliance on resits.

I raised questions about data gaps and explored possible reasons behind feedback delays, including staff workload and policy hurdles.

I led a discussion on why the 20-day feedback policy isn't always met and reviewed current efforts by programmes and Schools to improve this. Finally, I suggested actions like keeping feedback on the Partnership Board agenda, collecting detailed data on feedback timing, understanding staff challenges, and addressing any technical or policy issues, ensuring these discussions push real action in LTSEC and beyond.

### **Outcome of the Meeting:**

The board agreed that this is a major area of concern and needs to be looked at. Therefore, I will be meeting the deputy registrar on 22<sup>nd</sup> of November to discuss assessment & feedback and what we can do to improve it.

### **3. Enhance Graduate Employability**

In line with our collective goal of enhancing graduate employability, I've been collaborating closely with other presidents and working alongside the UWE Careers Team. My primary objective is to embed tailored career tools within each programme, ensuring students understand the steps needed to secure jobs in their specific fields. UWE has also launched an initiative called the "UWE Programmes," which will review each programme comprehensively—from structure and assessment style to student feedback. Careers support will be embedded within this framework, and I'm actively working with the Deputy Registrar and Academic Registrar to represent the Students' Union's perspective on this development.

Additionally, I proposed the introduction of a virtual career fair to complement the in-person event. This virtual fair will bring in international employers from around the world, creating valuable opportunities for students interested in pursuing careers outside the UK. This will be particularly beneficial for international students, broadening their career prospects. The Careers Team is set to hold this event in spring next year, offering a new platform for global employability.

### **4. Supporting student well-being during assessment periods.**

I am collaborating with our Community Team and VP Community and Welfare, Lubyana, to create a dedicated "De-Stress Zone" during exam season. This space will offer students a place to unwind and recharge, featuring freebies, painting activities, chalkboards, and other stress-relieving activities. Our



aim is to provide a supportive environment where students can take a break from their studies, relax, and feel more at ease during this intense period.

## Other Things that I've been doing:

### NUS National Lobby Day

We have met three MPs from Bristol (Claire Hazelgrove, Carla Denyer and Karin Smyth (PA)) at Westminster for NUS National Lobby Day. We lobbied to scrap the guarantor requirement for student housing and support Alex Sobel MP's Renter's Right Bill amendment. We discussed about tackling the rising cost of living for students, creating an ombudsman for student complaints, and supporting international students' futures.







### South West Regional Sabbatical Day

We hosted the South West Regional Sabbatical Day at the Students' Union at Frenchay Campus where we had some insightful training and workshops from NUS and Wonkhe about the recent student problem around UK.



### Fresher's Fair 2024

The Freshers' Fair 2024 was a fantastic success! We saw lots of amazing students engaging and joining in to explore the societies, services, and opportunities on campus. As VP Education, it was a pleasure meeting so many new faces and welcoming our fresh talent to the UWE community.

### Autumn Moon Festival

In October, I had the opportunity to join the Autumn Moon Festival celebratory banquet, where I connected with many of our Chinese UWE students and learned about their vibrant culture and traditions surrounding the festival. It was also a great honor to meet the Lord Mayor of Bristol, Andrew Varney. The evening was a wonderful celebration of community and cultural exchange.

