

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



Annual Report (24/25)

Name: Jess Hindley

Role: Student Officer Welfare

Introduction

Hello!

I have represented you as your Welfare Officer for almost 2 years now and in this report, I provide an overview of the work I have done in the past 10 months since I started my second term. The whole team has achieved a lot this year and it has been wonderful to work with them and our national union representatives this year.

I begin my report with a large update on the project which has taken up most of my time as an officer: the Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI) programme. This is a comprehensive harm reduction programme where the Students' Union and University work together to change our policies, processes and support offerings related to student drug and alcohol use. The DAI programme is made up of 53 criteria, and we must complete a sufficient amount of them to achieve accreditation in January 2026. The timing of this programme means that it will not be complete when I leave this role, but we have achieved so much already that I am confident we will achieve accreditation.

I then discuss some of the other campaigns I have been working on this year, including the new student welcome pilot some of the student safety work I have done this year, and the new compassionate communications project in collaboration with the University. Excitingly, there is also a lot of progress taking place in regards to improving student housing; particularly regarding student housing co-operatives which is still in progress but is looking increasingly likely. This was also the year where the SU wrote a new 5-year strategic plan, which the whole officer team contributed towards.

I also included an insight into some of the major repeating meetings which I have attended throughout the year. These give an insight into the day-to-day work which takes places outside of my project-based work. Finally, I have listed some of the key training and events that I have been involved with this year.

Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI) Programme

Last year I successfully lobbied the University to sign up for the Drug and Alcohol Impact (DAI) programme. The programme is 2 years long and we officially started in January 2024. This academic year, the programme went public and a lot of behind the scenes work finally began to impact on students.

- **Policy Change** – Rewrote the QUB policy on student drug and alcohol use, seeking feedback from all members of the steering group and managers within the Wellbeing team. This has now been sent to a senior university committee for approval. If approved, it will officially make QUB a harm reduction institution for the academic year 25/26.
- Worked with Neighbourhood Engagement and the Appeals, Conduct and Complaints team to **provide an alternative, educational alternative to fines** for students accused of drug-related conduct offenses – expected to be introduced for the 25/26 academic year
- Worked with the DAI Wellbeing lead to create general **harm reduction information** to be distributed through university channels (accommodation and neighbourhood engagement) as well as detailed, specific information for the wellbeing website and content for an SU booklet to be distributed during the Freshers' period.
- **Freshers' Fair stall** – The drug and alcohol awareness stall was held on the second and third day of Freshers' Fair, once outside and once inside. I manned the stand for a significant portion of those days, actively encouraging people to engage with the activities and teaching other staff members how to run the stand. It was very successful with over 600 students actively engaging.
 - I also organised this stand at the University's Beats and Bites event and the SU's Volunteering and Wellbeing fair
- Organised a joint event with the University Wellbeing service before **St Patrick's Day** which focused on alternatives to alcohol, safer ways to use alcohol and promoting ways to engage with the local community. It included a highly popular mocktail bar, promotion of the new student safety campaign, and an interactive free pour activity alongside the promotion of the drink checker to encourage students to consider their own alcohol use.
 - As a result of this event and the campaign more broadly there was an 80% decrease in on-campus incidents on and immediately after St Patrick's Day
- Over 6 days, promoted the **DAI survey** and harm reduction information by running awareness stands in the SU, PFC, Reboot and the MBC, engaging hundreds of students and gaining over 500 responses to the detailed student survey – the first of its kind in Northern Ireland
- Chaired **monthly steering group meetings** with representatives from the Students' Union, Wellbeing, Accommodation, Neighbourhood Engagement, Bars and Entertainment, Drug and Alcohol Research Network and the Appeals, Conduct, and Complaints team.

- **Monthly support calls** with SOS-UK to ensure that the project remains on track and gain advice on how to improve our current offerings
- Discussed DAI with several officers across the UK and Ireland, promoting harm reduction and helping them get involved with the programme
- Drug and Alcohol Impact **On-Site Support Day** – SOS-UK came to our campus to guide us through an all-day workshops which led to us creating our programme KPIs and brainstorming ideas for multiple innovative interventions.
- Participated in the **Digital Alcohol IBA** (Identification and Brief Advice) programme with SOS-UK and Drink Aware which provided us with harm reduction resources and a drink checker for students to self-assess their alcohol use
- I delivered multiple **presentations** on the programme to students and staff, explaining the programme, our progress and our future intentions.
- Attended two DAI online **group support days** on topics including neurodiversity and substance use, engaging with clubs and societies, evaluating events, harm reduction language and engaging students and academics effectively
- **Student Drug and Alcohol Conference** – Attended the Student Drug and Alcohol Conference and learned about building a more inclusive and sober curious campus, and the connections between substance use and neurodiversity, sexual violence, and mental health

Additional campaigns

- **Updated Welcome** – last year the officer team worked with the university to completed redesign the student welcome process. This year we worked to improve the onboarding and welcome portal and also participated in the new welcome pilot programme
- **Compassionate Communications** – I have co-chaired the compassionate communications project which aims to make the way staff communicate with students, especially when delivering challenging news, more compassionate
- **Student Housing Cooperatives** –
 - Elected as a director of Belfast Student Housing Co-operatives
 - Attended PESCHA Conference (see Events below)
 - Worked with the Campaigns and Engagement Officer to propose a version of cooperative housing to the University which could allow us to offer alternatives to current student housing options on an accelerated timeline
- **Student Safety** -
 - **Personal safety alarms** - Secured annual fund money for free personal safety alarms to be given to students at receptions. This was initially in response to the riots in summer 2024 but became a permanent fixture due to the large student demand
 - **SU Charter Tackling VAWG** – Contributed to Ulster University Students' Union's SU Charter for Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, attended

the launch event and signed it, alongside the Postgraduate Education Officer, on behalf of QSU.

- **5-Year Students' Union Strategic Plan** – Worked with the officer team and whole SU Staff to formulate the next SU Strategic Plan.

Regular Meetings

- **Scam Awareness committee**
- **#QUBeWell Management Group** - this group brings together teams from across the University who contribute to student wellbeing to ensure there is a cohesive and comprehensive offering.
- **NUS-USI Membership meetings** – meeting with NUS-USI and its members to stay updated with national lobbying work and the updates of other NI Students' Unions
- **Commercial Services Forum** – The Officer Team regularly meets with representatives from the Union Bar and Union Shop to stay up to date with the commercial services in the SU building and push for improvements
- **Student Support Forum** – Meet with members of staff from across the SU and University who are involved in supporting students, discussing things such as the HE Belonging project, The #QUBeWell Action Plan, the Compassionate Communications project student safety and consent programme, and changes to the accessible learning department (previously Disability)
- **Neighbourhood Forum** – A meeting between the university and representatives of the local South Belfast community to discuss updates within the area and how Queen's can be involved in improving the area
- **Students' Union Management Board**
- **SU Staff Forum** – I was the Officer Team representation to the Staff Forum where we raise issues within the SU
- **UCU-SU Meeting** – Regular meetings with UCU representatives to stay updated with each other's priorities and find areas of collaboration

Training/Workshops

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

- **Theory of Change Workshop** – Attended an all-day workshop in the Theory of Change process and learned how to effectively lead strategic projects that result in meaningful and impactful change as well as how to evaluate those changes.
- **Insights Workshop** – Engaged in the insights workshop to better understand my own work style, those of my fellow SU staff and officers, and how best we can work together.
- **ASCERT Understanding Alcohol Training** – Attended training to better understand alcohol use among young people and solutions to major problems within this area

- **See/Say/Signpost** - Participated in wellbeing training in how to most effectively help students experiencing issues with their wellbeing

Events/Conferences

- **Pride** – Marched in Belfast Pride along with the Student Officer teams from QSU and UUSU, NUS-USI, and many Belfast-based students.
- **NUS Lead and Change** – Attended and participated in Lead and Change (3-day student officer training/conference organised by NUS). Met and built relationships with returning student officers from across the UK, sharing ideas and learnings from our first year in office; providing advice to first year officers.
- **SUT+** - Attended two days of SUT+ (USI's Student Officer Training) where I participated in workshops on effective chairing; European Students Union (ESU) and the International Affairs Committee; and sustainability programmes as well as attending National Council.
- **Pan European Student Co-operative Housing Association (PESCHA) conference** – I attended the PESCHA 2024 conference in Geneva with the Campaigns and Engagement Officer, and the NUS-USI President in our capacity as co-directors of the Belfast Student Housing Co-operative. We toured student housing co-operative in Geneva and learned about the operation of student co-ops across Europe. We left with a clear 'next steps' plan.
- **Battle of the Bands** – Sat on both the shortlisting and judging panel for Battle of the Bands 2024
- **NUS Campaigns Exchange** – Attended the new NUS Campaigns Exchange where I worked with Student Officers from across the UK in workshops around NUS Reform, the Liberation Collective, Transport and Housing.
- **Russell Group SU Conference** – Participated in the Russell Group Students' Union conference, discussing future plans with officers from other Russell Group Students' Unions
- **Queen's VS Ulster Varsity Event**– Attended our Varsity Victory event to celebrate the Queen's victory over Ulster
- **Housing Quizzes** – Hosted two Housing Quizzes (in BT1 and BT9) to help educate students on their housing rights
- **European Student Convention** – I attended the European Students' Union (ESU)'s 49th European Student Convention in Galway to learn and discuss more about how various topics including micro-credentials, Assessment, engagement, inclusivity and gender-based violence are handled at different Students' Unions across Europe
- **International Women's Day Panel**– I sat on an IWD panel where I discussed the issues faced by women students and how the government, universities, and students' unions can tackle these issues

- **NUS-USI Democracy Event (Conference)** – Meeting with SUs from across NI and our national union NUS-USI on topics including the HE Funding Review and NUS Liberation Collective

Conclusion

In 2 months, my time as a Student Officer will come to an end. Over the past almost 2 years I have had the opportunity to work on so many incredible projects with amazing people within the University and across the UK and Ireland. Overall, I believe that I have achieved, or at least contributed towards the success of, most of my goals as an officer – though of course there is always going to be more than I wish I had done. I know that the incoming Welfare (and Community) Officer is going to do amazing work and I'm very happy to know I will be leaving the post in good hands. For the second year, I have been blessed with an incredible team to work with, and I am incredibly proud of all that they have achieved this year. I want to thank them, and the SU Voice team, for all of their support throughout the year

I am so grateful to students for trusting me to take this position; it has been a wonderful and memorable two years.

For the last time,

In solidarity,

Jess Hindley, Student Officer Welfare