Ahoy!

Ahoy maties and congratulations on being elected as a Students' Union Councillor for the 2014-15 sitting on Queen's Students' Union Council. I look forward to working with you throughout the year and making life at Queen’s better for all students. I thoroughly encourage you to be proactive in your new roles.

Below is a report of the meetings and other activities which I have been involved in since I took up office on the 1st July 2014.

If you have any queries about anything contained or indeed that is not contained within this report please do not hesitate to get in touch by emailing me at su_president@qub.ac.uk. Alternatively I’d be happy to schedule an appointment with anyone who’d like to meet up to discuss any item of work in more detail. I invite you

Committees, Sub-Committees, Meetings and Working Groups

I list meetings of note since taking office:

University

Senate
Planning and Finance Committee
Academic Council
Directors of Education Forum
Meeting with Director of Development & Alumni Relations Office
Special Committee for Appointment of Chancellor
Higher Education Review Planning Group
Education Enhancement Programme Sub Group

Regular meetings with the Vice-Chancellor (at least monthly)
Regular meetings with the Registrar (at least monthly)
Regular meetings with the Director of Student Plus (weekly)
Meetings with the Director of Academic and Student Affairs and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Students

Meeting with staff from Careers, Employability and Skills
Meeting with Residential Life Team

Induction Presentations to Freshers in various Schools
Queen’s Graduate Association Committee Meeting
Graduation Ceremonies
Graduation Lunch and photo call with Student of the Year
Graduation Dinner  
PG Students Welcome Reception  
GB Student Welcome Dinner  
Officer Training Corp Visit  
Meeting with University Communications Team  
Disciplinary Officer Training  

Students’ Union  

SU Councillors Training  
Inaugural Meeting of the Students’ Union Council  

Students’ Union Management Board (2)  
Students’ Union Executive Management Committee (weekly)  
SU Management Team Meetings (weekly)  
Freshers’ Fair Meetings  
SSCC Training Sessions  

Director’s Appraisal  
Advice Centre Meeting  

Union Stall at Elms During Welcome Weekend  
Freshers’ Fair Tour with Acting Vice-Chancellor  
Shortlisting Panel for Marketing Manager  
Interview panel for Marketing Manager  
RAG Pub Crawl  
Officer Briefings (weekly)  
President – SU Director Sweep (weekly)  
Meetings with the Bars and Ents team  
Finance and budgets meetings with SU Management  
Regular meetings with the Chair and lay members of SU Management Board  
Meetings with representatives of various Clubs and Societies  
Meetings with potential food outlets  
Attended the University’s Remembrance Sunday Ceremony  
Welcome Speech – All Students’ Union Staff  
Strategic Plan Working Group  
Elections Working Group  
Welcome Period Review  

External  

USI Students’ Union Training  
USI Students’ Union Plus Training  
NUS-USI NSS Day  
NUS-USI Regional Council  
NUS-USI Presidents’ Meeting  
NUS-USI Public Affairs Day  

Meeting with UCU Trade Union President and Representatives  

Meeting with Belfast Lord Mayor  
Meeting with Public Health Agency  
Meeting with NUS-USI President  
Meeting with Ian Williamson (NUS-USI)
Campaigns, Activities and Other Initiatives

Welcome Period

The Welcome period this year was very successful with more students than ever taking part in events held across campus.

Some highlights include:

- The Open Days
- Welcome & Orientation Weekend
- International Buddy Scheme
- International Culture Crawl
- Freshers’ Fair

The total number of stalls at the two-day Freshers’ Fair event was 264. Footfall on Day One of the event (featuring Societies) was 8,712 (55% of total attendance) whilst the number of people present on Day Two (featuring Sporting Clubs and Academic Societies) was 7,111 (45% of total attendance).

Students’ Union Council Elections – October 2014

Students’ Union Council elections took place on 14 October 2014 and 21 October 2014, via Queen’s Online, in the following constituencies for the 2014-15 session:

- Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences
- Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences
- Postgraduate
- Open
- Open First Year

The following was noted:

- That there had been a total of 242 candidates for the recent Students’ Union Council elections:
  
  - 98 candidates in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences constituency
  - 44 candidates in the Engineering and Physical Sciences constituency
  - 20 candidates in the Medicine, Health and Life Sciences constituency
  - 26 candidates in the Postgraduate constituency
  - 36 candidates in the Open constituency
  - 18 candidates in the Open First Year constituency

- That the above total of 242 represented an increase against the 2013 figure of 207 candidates.
− That the number of votes cast in the Students’ Union Council elections was as follows:

- 520 votes cast in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences constituency
- 186 votes cast in the Engineering and Physical Sciences constituency
- 158 votes cast in the Medicine, Health and Life Sciences constituency
- 154 votes cast in the Postgraduate constituency
- 586 votes cast in the Open constituency
- 219 votes cast in the Open First Year constituency

− That 1,823 votes were cast in total. This is the second biggest turnout on record.

− That the above total of 1,823 represented an increase against the 2013 figure of 1,765 votes.

A promotional and marketing strategy was developed to promote the role of the Students’ Union Council, to encourage students to stand for election and subsequently, to vote in the elections. Marketing included digital as well as face-to-face promotion, to include induction talks. Students from traditionally under-represented groups were also proactively encouraged to stand for election.

The Students’ Union is committed to ensuring that all of its members are treated equally and that they get involved in the decision making processes of the Union. Candidates are asked to complete an equality monitoring form so that the combined information from all candidates can be used to bring to light those groups in the student community where more work needs to be done, in order to encourage them to run for positions such as those on the Students’ Union Council. This form is entirely anonymous and the information provided has no impact upon the outcome of the electoral process. The information provided is used to develop strategies that will make candidates in future elections more representative of the overall student community.

School Representative Elections 2014-15

Students’ Union Council elections also took place on 21 October 2014 and 27 October 2014, via Queen’s Online, in the School Representatives constituency for the 2014-15 session. These elections are delivered by the Schools and supported by the Students’ Union – the following was noted:

− That the total number of candidates who had put themselves forward for election to the position of School Representative was a record 128 (there were 110 candidates in the prior year).

− That the number of votes cast in the 19 contested School Representative elections was:

- 166 votes in the School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science
- 85 votes in the School of Law
- 85 votes in the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences
- 77 votes in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Paleoecology
- 72 votes in the School of Maths and Physics
- 54 votes in the School of Biological Sciences
- 50 votes in the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy
- 50 votes in the School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work
- 49 votes in the School of Management
- 47 votes in the School of Nursing and Midwifery
- 46 votes in the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering
- 41 votes in the School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering
- 41 votes in the Institute of Theology
- 40 votes in the School of English
- 16 votes in the School of Modern Languages
- 15 votes in the School of Psychology
- 14 votes in the School of Education
- 12 votes in the School of Creative Arts
- 12 votes in the School of Pharmacy

- A record total of 972 votes cast (there were 645 votes in the prior year)

In a further two Schools, it is noted that only one candidate was nominated – these students were declared elected without an online poll being required. In one Institute, no students put themselves forward for nomination.

**Students' Union Referendum – Monday 27 October 2014**

The following two proposals were brought to student referendum by constitutional means of petition. The petitions were launched and run by Union members. The proposals considered at a Students' Union Referendum Day on Monday 27 October 2014:

- Should Ireland be a united and independent country?   Yes / No

- This Students’ Union is a shared space that is inclusive for all students and should therefore have a neutral stance on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland – do you agree with this statement?  Yes / No

The results were as follows:

**REFERENDUM 1**

Should Ireland be a united and independent country?

**YES** 1,264 (49.6%)

**NO** 1,285 (50.4%)

This proposal was defeated.

**REFERENDUM 2**
This Students’ Union is a shared space that is inclusive for all students and should therefore have a neutral stance on the constitutional position of Northern Ireland – do you agree with this statement?

YES 2,596 (86.4%)
NO 409 (13.6%)

This proposal was passed, and becomes mandatory policy for Queen’s University Belfast Students’ Union.

The total number of students who voted on Monday 27 October 2014 was 3,524 (or 15.09% of the eligible electorate).

The total number of students who voted in Referendum 1 on the above date was 2,549 (or 10.92% of the eligible electorate).

The total number of students who voted in Referendum 2 on the above date was 3,005 (or 12.87% of the eligible electorate).

Prior to these referenda the Union had zero policy on the Northern Irish question. This being the case the officers were in fact free to support whatever case they personally believed. It was decided together that having received mixed feedback on the referenda and discussing the officers’ stances on it the officers best position was to not promote either side of either referenda but to await the result and move forward from whatever the result was. In considerations and contacts from students, the university and the media as well as many reviews of the Union Constitution the referenda required considerable attention and time from the executive.

**Strategic Plan**

Our current Students’ Union Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015 is due to expire and a Strategic Plan Working Group has been created and held several meetings on devising appropriate and effective methods of developing a new plan based on the opinions of students from a variety of backgrounds. The Strategic Plan is the fundamental aims and objectives of the Union over a period of time and as a result of a decision at Management Board the new Plan shall run for five years (2015 – 2020).

A set of four Focus Groups are underway and will be completed by next Council meeting. The Focus Groups are themed as: Councillors, SSCCs, Clubs & Societies, Non-Engaged students. It was stressed that in recruiting for these groups there should ideally be diversity of students representing on them. So far I have attended each of these and recurring themes and messages are getting through.

**Higher Education Review**

An exciting prospect for the Students’ Union is the Higher Education Review which is due at Queen’s. The review is run by the Quality Assurance Agency and universities are subject to it every six years. The review requires a self-evaluation from the SU. Previously this was adapted into the University’s evaluation but for the first a separate evaluation shall be sent from the University and the Union. I sit on the Higher Education Review Planning Group in the university.
The purpose of the review is to assure that the university is performing in all areas to the outlined standards of UK Higher Educations institutions found in the Quality Code. The university is eager to prepare an excellent report. This is a particularly strong opportunity for students to raise issues with their education and university services and to be heard clearly.

**Engagement & Communications**

Following the Student Survey (aka Blooming Brilliant Survey) it was clearly highlighted in analysis as a recurring theme that SU needs to improve in its efficiency in communicating with its students. In line with the research being undertaken for the Strategic Plan and our new Marketing Manager changes shall be made to our communications particularly in the online arena. The Student officers are aware of the challenges in terms of engagement and it is a high priority around which we are centralising our general efforts. Student Officers spoke to students as part of the induction talks to new and returning students.

In the effort to raise awareness of the democratic services of the union and the importance of the students' role in that an Election Working Group has been set up to diagnose issues with voter turnouts, candidate numbers for student elections.

A campaign of SU Pop-ups based on the concept of relocating the offices and faculties of the SU to other parts of campus was launched and since this the SU has ‘popped up’ in the MBC, the McClay Library, the International and Postgraduate Centre and is also due to appear in the PFC. The concept is based very much on the idea that human ‘face to face’ contact is the best form of engagement.

The Students' Union now has a Snapchat account ‘qubsu' which I invite you and all your friends to add to your Snapchat lists.

**Live Policy File**

The Live Policy File containing all current policy created by Council is to be reviewed in its entirety by the officers at earliest possible opportunity. A report on this will be made as soon as possible.

**Appointment of new Chancellor Selection Process**

I am currently involved in the process of selecting a new Chancellor of the University as a member of the selection committee. The current Chancellor, His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, is leaving the post on the 31st December. Nominations contributed by both students and staff were considered and are now shortlisted. The purpose of the next meeting is to rank the shortlisted nominations in terms of preference so as to pursue the desired individuals.

**Appointment of new Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Students**

The university has appointed a new Pro Vice Chancellor for Education and Students Professor David Jones upon the retirement of his predecessor. Professor Jones has shown great warmth towards the Students' Union and its role in improving education at Queen’s. He is working closely with myself and particularly the VP Education.
National Student Survey Results 2014

The results of the new question 23 of the National Student Survey were released recently. Question 23 asked students to rate how satisfied they are in their Students’ Union. Queen’s SU achieved a 78% satisfaction rating compared to 80% last year. This places the SU at 19th place in the UK rankings. The university received an 86% overall satisfaction ranking.

DEL Cuts

I have consulted with various sources including the Pro Vice Chancellor for Academic Planning, Staffing and External Affairs, the UCU, NUS-USI, Ulster University SU on gathering information, arguments and evidence on the matter of the 10.8% proposed cuts to DEL. Also I have discussed with these same parties the most effective means of tackling the issue.

The Union at the moment is currently taking the following actions:

- Submitting a public consultation to the Department of Finance and Personal.
- Launching a campaign on raising awareness to students and to encourage them to write letters to their MLAs.
- Investigating along with NUS-USI the feasibility of protest demonstrations. This will hopefully be confirmed by the time of Council Meeting on the 18th November.

I would request for the good of the student body that Councillors take note of this information and are proactive in raising awareness amongst students as to this issue and to encourage them to participate in as many actions we facilitate as possible.

Research on International Students

It has become apparent to me that there is little research on data on which to base a strong engagement strategy. I have been meeting with various staff in the university to arrange a potential survey to identify the nuances of social needs of students that are on campus from a variety of cultures very different to our own in many respects.

Pirate Matters

In the preparation for the year and amidst other pressing priorities the President (aka The Captain) wishes to assure Council that: the matter of a Jolly Roger is being pursued; that he has opened communications with the Engineering society on cannons; there have been extensions to drink promotions

Thank You

The President would like to thank the staff, management and the Student Officers for all their hard work. Bravo!
Ciarán Gallagher
President