



QUEEN'S STUDENTS' UNION

EDUCATION OFFICER REPORT

Jason Bunting



Contact at: su.education@qub.ac.uk / 028 9097 3724 July-August 2019

Introduction

A chairde,

As outlined in my plan of work last Council, my priorities this year centre on student representation, student voice and making sure that students are partners not customers in higher education.

In this context, it is a pleasure to be able to present the first of my Officer reports to Council. As you can imagine, from July-August the new team was settling into their roles, establishing priorities for the year and it was an extremely productive but also enjoyable few months.

As most academics are away from the University during this time, it offered me a chance to prepare thoroughly for the year ahead and work on the priorities on which I was elected.

Key Priorities:

- Academic Rep Review
- Review of Impact of Academic Year
- Enhancement of Student Partnership Project
- Co-creation of feedback strategies
- Expansion of Peer Mentoring
- Canvas rollout
- AHSS Employability
- Irish language rights in the curriculum

Academic Rep Review

As a former Course Rep and School Rep, my major priority in my role is the redevelopment of academic representation at Queen's. This project has been termed the Academic Rep Review (ARR) and over these two months I established this as a priority of both the Union and the University's work on student engagement in the year ahead.

The Students' Union and the University share a commitment to embed a culture of partnership between our students and staff. The main way in which students routinely engage in the work of partnership and have their voice heard on their education is through our system of academic representation. It is therefore a key priority for me and I hope for Council in the months ahead.

As you all know, every year, the Students' Union and the University collaborate to elect, train and support around eight hundred academic representatives. These representatives can be best understood as educational activists, volunteers who aim to make change for their cohorts through constructive engagement with University structures. They make the voice of students heard by acting as a key liaison between the all students and the University by working in partnership.

However, as outlined in my plan of work, a number of key challenges face our system of academic representation. Our major structural challenge centres on ownership of the system. Are reps Union-led or University-managed? How do we negotiate the relationship between our reps as ambassadors of change from the Union, educational activists, and their proximity to university structures? Moreover, the visibility of our reps is low. Communication between reps, between the Union and reps and between the University and our reps could be improved. We don't give enough support and guidance to our reps or University staff members. We also don't provide adequate reward and recognition for our reps. SSCCs need to be re-thought, as they often become a kind of 'complaining forum' with no clear actions. The quality of our digital provision for our representatives is often low. Finally, we need to do more to demonstrate the impact of our representatives.

We can learn from many other institutions who often out-perform QUB and QUBSU on academic representation. Over the summer, I completed research on student academic representation and established a number of recommendations for enhancement at QUB.

Research has consisted of:

- Desk-based research of around 130 different institutions
- Compilation of eight case studies of best practice
- Benchmarking exercises
- Brainstorming exercise
- Surveys of School and Course Reps

There are three main goals of the ARR:

1. To develop QUB/SU as a model of best practice for student representation
2. To enhance our system based on NUS benchmarking by elevating our structures from 'Developed' to 'Outstanding' in two years.
3. To agree a framework of representation between the Union and institution detailing shared roles and responsibilities

Over the summer, this research was collated and a number of benchmarking and brainstorming exercises were undertaken and the findings were presented to internal stakeholders.

Get in touch if you would like a copy of this research.

Review of Impact of Academic Year

In 2017/18 the academic year was restructured to replace January exams with innovative, continuous forms of assessment. This was based on sound principles of a move away from exams and essays, to assessment styles which prepare students for employability and equip them with useful skills. The intention of the academic year was to move from assessment OF learning (simple regurgitation of facts) to assessment FOR learning (when assessment plays a valuable part of your academic experience).

The academic year, however, was restructured before the necessary changes to assessments had been made. This resulted, as many of you will be aware, in an over-reliance on assessment styles like essays and class tests. This posed a number of problems:

1. There was no appropriate assessment period at the end of the first semester, leading to students being both expected to attend class and complete assignments
2. Assessment dates were often bunched, meaning you have multiple assignments due on the same day.

3. Class tests were commonplace across the institution, which are simply exams by any other name without appropriate provision for students who need flexibility
4. Students balance multiple commitments as adults including employment, extracurricular activities, leadership roles in the local community. The pressure the new structure puts on students is unacceptable and in a year where we focus on mental health as a priority, the impact academic pressures have is key in explaining the mental health crisis.
5. Academic experience is indivisible from student wellbeing

Over the summer, I have been working closely with LDS to support students in the first instance during this period. Initially, we considered workshops for students to support them through deadlines. We will consider further methods to support students in the months ahead.

Over the summer, I consulted with Directors of Education about the academic year structure and gathered their input.

The OMNI survey asked specifically about academic pressures and the results of these will inform a lobbying campaign in the second half of semester one to address the concerns raised by the academic year in a more long-term way.

Enhancement of Student Partnership Project

The Student Partnership Project was co-created by the Students' Union and the University from 2017-2018 and launched in December 2019, with a pilot rollout in Semester two last academic year.

In higher education, it is the Union's position that students should not be consumers of education, or customers. Instead, students should be partners with a joint voice and role in the quality of their education. They should actively shape their education and co-create their educational experience with the University.

The SU and the University have jointly committed through this project to establish students as partners.

The Project aims to embed a culture of student-staff partnership on campus to ensure students as partners. The Project focuses on four strands of enhancing the student experience: student voice, communication, academic enhancement and representation.

There are three main strands to our strategy towards student partnership which has been agreed with the University during the summer:

- Continued rollout of **local-level project applications** in semester one. These are examples of students and staff working together in partnership to enhance the learning experience. Previous examples include a welfare pack for students on their year abroad in AEL, development of PAL in CCE and enhanced student representation in Management.
- The **Enhancing Assessment through partnership project**: it was agreed in the summer for continued funding for this project, which employs paid student partners to investigate student assessment and feedback matters.
- Institutional projects and **wider governance**: it was agreed that it is necessary to embed partnership in the governance of the SU and University and that institutional projects featured in the Framework need reviewing in the academic year 2019/20.

Overall, this is an extremely exciting project and I am looking forward to continuing to embed a culture of partnership this year and ensure that the voices of students are effectively embedded in the spirit of partnership.

Co-creation of Feedback Strategies

Feedback is a critical part of the learning experience and it is essential that the University adopts effective strategies for the enhancement of feedback. In particular, the Union would welcome the development of feedback policies.

These policies must meet the expectations of students (timely, detailed, constructive, effective feedback) while balancing the staff requirements of resources.

Over the next year, we need to champion best practice and address poor quality of feedback, with the aim of establishing feedback strategies and policies which have been co-created by students and staff in the spirit of partnership.

Over the summer, a review of student partnership was undertaken which included a review of the assessment and feedback projects in the Student Partnership Framework.

In July-August, it was agreed that the focus on feedback could be most effectively advanced through the recruitment of student interns and a continuation of funding through the Enhancing Assessment through partnership project.

Lobbying efforts on this point were successful and funding was secured for this Project.

Expansion of Peer Mentoring

As many of you will be aware, peer mentoring is an extremely valuable aspect of the learning experience. Students who volunteer their time to support other students play a critical role in ensuring that concerns are raised, queries dealt with and that all members of the Students' Union have a rewarding experience at Queen's.

Over the summer, I met with the Learning Development Service to establish what role the Union could play in supporting Peer Mentoring over the course of the next year, while preserving the essential student-led quality of peer mentoring.

Discussions are ongoing and I will keep Council updated on any actions we can take.

Canvas rollout

Over the summer, I represented students in meetings with the Canvas team on the rollout of Canvas in the academic year 2019/20.

After a successful pilot year in 2018/19, I wanted to ensure that the student voice was present in the next phase. Although Canvas offers an exceptional experience to most, some concerns remain around the readiness of lecturers to move from QOL seamlessly. The Canvas team worked hard during the summer to offer training to all staff members on Canvas and I supported them in doing so, as well as making preparations for necessary communications to students.

AHSS Employability

As outlined in my plan of work, many students of humanities feel that the careers provision for humanities students is sub-optimal compared to those of other disciplines.

Over the course of the summer, I had productive conversations with relevant University staff members about a strategy for the year ahead.

Much of this work may depend on engaging with student representatives and as such, the report from Sept-Oct is more relevant for this point.

Other Issues I am working on:

- Supporting personal tutoring
- Championing UG Research
- Working with the Irish Language Officer to support the rights of Gaeilgeoiri through the curricula

Overall, summer was a busy time but I hope you will all agree that it was extremely productive and a lot of groundwork was laid for a successful year ahead.

As always, I am on hand to answer any queries from this report or on any aspect of your educational experience at Queen's so don't hesitate to get in touch at su.education@qub.ac.uk!

Go raibh maith agaibh,

Jason

Meetings/events attended

Meeting	Date
Meeting with Caroline Young	2 July
MHLS PG Education Sub Group	3 July
Meeting with Karen Fraser about Partnership	4 July
Meeting with Louise McGeough about Academic Representation	"
Meet the officers Lunch	"
Students' Union Training (Athlone)	8-12 July
Meeting with LDS	16 July
Representation Student Voice brainstorming session	17 July
EMC (recurring every two weeks)	"
Meeting with LDS	18 July
Meeting with Partnership Interns	"
Meeting with founder of Unitu	19 July
Meeting with Management DE	22 July
Canvas rollout meeting	23 July
AHSS WP Session	"
HAPP DE Meeting	24 July
Meeting with Faculty Officer AHSS	"
EEECS DE Meeting	"
PG representation meeting	24 July
AEL DE Meeting	25 July
MAE DE Meeting 26 July	26 July
Canvas orientation course meeting	29 July
Meeting with UDL	30 July
Filming for Canvas	"
Meeting about Peer Mentoring with LDS	"
Meeting with Policy and Engagement Manager	"
Graduate interns	"
Development weeks WG- Review	"

Law DE meeting	31 July
Students as members of appeals meeting	1 August
Nursing & Midwifery DE Meeting	“
Officer stall brainstorming	“
Visit from VP Academic Affairs USI	2 August
Pride Belfast	3 August
New build meeting with SU Director	5 August
Dean of Graduate Studies	6 August
Information Services meeting	“
Unitu meeting with Su Director	“
Students' Union Training Plus- Jordanstown	7-9 August
Canvas rollout meeting	12 August
Information services meeting	13 August
NBE DE meeting	“
UDL Group	14 August
Community engagement meeting	“
Meeting with CED	15 August
TextHelp meeting with CED	16 August
AEL new DE meeting	“
Media training	19 August
Psychology DE	20 August
Meeting with LDS about academic year	21 August
AHSS employability meeting	“
DASA meeting	“
Unitu demo	“
Team meeting	22 August
DLSPIG	“
Advice SU meeting	“
Limerick SU Visit	23 August
Dean of Education MHLS	26 August
NUS USI National partnership framework	“
Student Rep Training (Canvas)	27 August
Estates meeting	“
Rep Room painting	28 August
CED Partnership meeting	“
AHSS Dean of Education meeting	“
Social event: QUB RAs hosted by Officers	“
VideoScribe Training	29 August
PG representation	“
Housing event meeting	“
Public Engagement meeting	30 August
NIO Briefing	“



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Outline

A chairde,

Over the past two months, I have worked hard to ensure that I am fulfilling the promises set out in my manifesto. We have made good progress on a number of key priorities and it is heartening to see our projects come along so quickly in such a short amount of time.

Read on to find out more!

Key Priorities:

- Academic Rep Review
- Academic Representation: system delivery
- Review of Impact of Academic Year
- Enhancement of student partnership project
- Co-creation of feedback strategies
- Expansion of Peer Mentoring
- Canvas rollout
- AHSS Employability

Academic Rep Review

From July-August significant research was undertaken and several recommendations were produced for the system of academic representation (see below).

In September, I made a presentation to all Heads of Schools, Directors, Pro Vice Chancellors and the Registrar to secure their buy-in. Several presentations and consultation exercises have since followed this. The Rep Review has been presented to the Dean's Business Group, Directors of Education Forum, Director of Student Plus, DASA among others. It therefore has good visibility in the University.

Good progress has been made on the recommendations but more consultation is needed. A summary of important developments from each theme has been detailed below:

- **Process:** MHLS Faculty Officer has been afforded a seat on the highest level committee in Faculties, Faculty Executive Board. This represents the first time a student has been afforded representation at this level. Work continues in AHSS and EPS to enhance Faculty representation.
- **Visibility:** Branding exercise undertaken for student voice, including academic reps. Names and photos are to be included on the website by SU Marketing.
- **Communication:** School Rep emails introduced (e.g. aelschoolrep@qub.ac.uk) First Course Rep Forums ever introduced in the SU to afford students a chance to share practise
- **Reward and recognition:** Secured funding for 'Rep Celebration' and work begun on a 'Rep Room' for Union

- **Support and guidance:** Induction procedure introduced for School Reps and pre-drafted emails and PPT slide deck to use during elections introduced
- **Digital representation:** Promotional video produced and Unitu introduction explored
- **SSCCs:** Buy-in secured for an overhaul of SSCC guidelines and workshop scheduled
- **Impact:** Student Voice Report to be produced

These represent a number of developments from Sept-Oct and work continues in earnest.

The Academic Rep Review will be presented to Academic Board in November, followed by a workshop of relevant members of staff and consultation with School and Course Reps.

Overall, this has been an extremely period but the Academic Rep Review is making good progress.

Academic Representation

In other news, the team worked hard in September-October to promote and support the election process to over eight hundred rep positions.

The Union has made several efforts to promote these elections including:

- Filming of a promotional video
- Lecture detailing the elections sent to all Heads of Schools and DEs for dissemination
- Email sent to all Schools for dissemination to students
- All-student email from SU
- Promotion on social media
- Over 2000 leaflets distributed

These elections are a partnership between the SU and University and as such, we were disappointed with the low engagement from Schools. Hopefully, part of what the Academic Rep Review seeks to address is the strengthening of this partnership.

I have since worked with the Academic Representation Assistant to deliver eleven Course Rep Training sessions. These sessions include condensed training from last year with increased interactivity and feedback has been extremely positive. Four more sessions have been scheduled for November.

Review of Impact of Academic Year

From our OMNI survey, academic pressures were identified as the single biggest pressure affecting mental health of students. As discussed in the last report, the pressure and stress which the new academic year restructure has placed on students, in particular with regards to the bunching of deadlines, is unacceptable.

Lobbying efforts continue on the academic year, but it is vital students are supported throughout this period (weeks 6-12).

In my last report, I suggested workshops with LDS. We have since decided against this strategy, as we want our efforts to reach maximum possible number of students and these workshops are already offered.

- **Support for students:** communicating as a Union the sources of support available to students
- **Student voice strategy:** making students voices heard on the structure
- **Lobbying efforts:** working in partnership with DASA and senior management to find a solution to the issues raised by the academic year structure

Taken together, we hope that these three strands of our approach to the academic year meet with Council's approval.

Enhancement of Student Partnership Project

Work has continued to effectively embed the Student Partnership project in University governance since August.

- **Local-level partnership projects:** As outlined in my last report, local-level projects offer a chance for students and staff to work together on specific Projects to enhance the student experience. Applications for Projects are open until Nov 15 so if there is a cause you are particularly interested in; this is a perfect opportunity to have that recognised by the University and advanced! Make sure to fill out a template form and send it back to me (the form should be sent out to you all)!
- **Enhancing Assessment through partnership:** more details below on student interns and I am working with CED to recruit a graduate intern to work on specific assessment strategies within Schools
- **Institutional projects:** Institutional projects are due for completion and review in 2020. Full details can be found in the Student Partnership Framework. I have had productive conversations with the University on embedding partnership in any revised Scheme of Delegation (i.e. an official role in the committee structures) and hope to work closely with DASA on this in the months ahead.

This project is vital in ensuring our members are treated as partners in education and I am excited to continue to make progress on this Project in the coming months.

Co-creation of Feedback Strategies

As outlined in my previous report, funding was secured for the continuation of the Enhancing Assessment through Partnership Project. As part of this, we conducted a review of last year's project. We then devised a plan for the potential recruitment of student interns working with key University partners in the Centre for Educational Development.

Following this, we then recruited and inducted three student interns to work on assignment feedback, to be based in the Students' Union and working in a Faculty each.

These are:

- Sarah Murray: MHLS
- Angela Rogan: AHSS
- Kathleen Goldsmith: EPS

So if you see emails/other activity from these folk please do get involved with their work as they facilitate the co-creation of feedback policies by students and staff. This is a very exciting project and I am delighted to liaise with these three interns very closely. There is a lot we can achieve together and I am hoping you will give them all your full support as we do so.

Expansion of Peer Mentoring

As outlined in my previous report, I met with LDS in the Summer months to establish how I could support Peer Mentoring in the year ahead.

I have worked closely with the Lead Peer Mentor in AEL, Úna Quinn, to explore and implement the first ever Peer Mentoring Forum. This forum meets twice a semester and brings together the lead peer mentors from across the institution. We have met once in a productive session and will

schedule another meeting for the mentors for an update before the end of term. We will then meet twice a semester in Semester Two.

It is a privilege to work with Peer Mentors and do my part in the SU to help strengthen this system.

Canvas rollout

As you all are probably aware, the University rolled out our new Virtual learning environment, Canvas this year in September. I took a number of proactive steps to ensure that the student voice is heard on this important development.

I reviewed the Student content of Canvas @Queen's blog and wrote content from the student perspective. I also ensured that the content of the Student Orientation Course was appropriate. On Canvas' request, I filmed a video guiding students on the student content of the Canvas Orientation Course.

I have now begun preparations for the introduction of a new voluntary role, one student in every School will be given the opportunity to develop their digital capabilities working closely with the Canvas team as a champion for digital literacy. I continue to hold a seat on the Digital Literacy Strategy Project Implementation Group, the Digital Literacy Working Group and the Digital Literacy Strategy Steering Group. At all appropriate opportunities, I ensure students are consulted on Canvas.

Now that Phase 3 of the Canvas rollout is almost complete, I am now preparing to support students as assignments are uploaded on Canvas.

AHSS Employability

As per my previous report, I continue to work closely with Careers, Employability and Skills on the support of AHSS Employability.

There are a few strands to my strategy on this:

1. Development of an alumni mentoring scheme with DARO: in development, this scheme would see notable alumni come to Queen's to liaise with students in AHSS
2. Development of a new communications strategy with CES: I am working closely with University staff to develop how we communicate the opportunities which are currently available.
3. Work with student reps in AHSS to establish what CES should provide in terms of careers provision, and develop a framework which sustainably enhances current careers provision

Other Issues:

- Continue to work with the Irish Language Officer to support the rights of Gaeilgeoirí through the curricula
- Continue to work closely with student reps to support research.
- Work closely with CED on Universal Design for Learning

These have been a busy but very exciting two months as I continue to advance these priorities, as well as continue to support students.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with any issues at su.education@gub.ac.uk

Go raibh maith agaibh,

Jason

Meetings attended

Meeting	Dates
UDL Seminar	2 September
Canvas blog meeting	3 September
Student voice- VP Ed Plan of work	"
DASA, partnership and representation meeting	"
Team building day	4 September
DARO meeting	"
Videoscribe training	5 September
UCU meeting about academic year	"
VideoScribe	6 September
SSESW Representation	"
Meeting with CED/UDL	"
Social media video meetin	"
Open day	7 September
Health and safety training	9 September
Talk at Personal Tutor training EPS	10 September
Student Rep Champion Management	"
Buddy Scheme Prep	11 Sept
International Students Welcome Fair	"
Student Experience Group	"
Talk at personal tutor training MHLS	"
Talk at personal tutor training AHSS	12 Sept
International buddy scheme meet up	"
Buddy scheme training with SU President	"
Commercial services forum	13 September
International buddy scheme pub crawl	"
Induction talks over fresher's	Continuous (16 Sept- 1 Oct)
UDL working group	16 Sept
SU sweep	17 Sept
SU Stratgic Plan Sub Group	"
Filming for academic reps	"
RAG Pub Crawl	"
Big Brunch	18 Sept
Irish language meeting with ILO and Staff	"
DLSPIG	19 Sept
DE Forum	"
Social media training	"
SRG first meeting	"
Strike for climate action	20 Sept
Meeting with PVC Education and students on representation	"

Senior Manager's Presentation on Academic Representation	23 Sept
Reps in Constitution meeting	24 Sept
Run for Something	"
UUSU Meeting	"
QUBSU Fresher's Fair	25-26 Sept
Meeting with candidate for Officer position	27 Sept
Education Strategy Implementation Group	30 Sept
Student Complaint Process	"
AHSS Estates Meeting	"
DLSPIG	1 Oct
Dean of Education EPS	"
Management School Open Evening	"
Meeting with Irish Language Officer	2 Oct
Meeting about Feedback Posts with Student Voice	"
Meeting with Theology DE and Course Rep	"
Black History Month Launch	"
Run to Win drop-in sessions	3 Oct
AHSS Student Social Spaces	"
Meeting about partnership posts	4 Oct
L2 Year Abroad student talk	7 Oct
DASA Senior Team Managers meeting	"
STAR First Meeting	"
Student meeting	8 Oct
MHLS Faculty Education Sub group	"
Student Engagement: Rep Elections	"
Meeting with LDS on academic skills	"
Visit to Union Theological College	9 Oct
Supporting Student Attainment and Achievement Group	"
Canvas rollout update	10 Oct
DLS Steering Group	"
PG rep training meeting	"
Shortlisting partnership candidates meeting	11 Oct
BAME attainment gap meeting with CED and VP Equality	14 Oct
Shortlisting for Partnership	"
School Rep Email meeting	"
VideoScribe meeting	"
Lecture Capture meeting	15 Oct
Peer Mentoring Forum	"
DASA Student Representation meeting	"
Sick day	16 Oct
Marketing requirements- student reps	17 Oct
AHSS Estates	"
Partnership Posts: Interviews	18 Oct

Course Rep Training	21 Oct (x2)
	22 Oct (x2)
	23 Oct (x2)
	24 Oct (x2)
Education Committee	21 Oct
Project Choice Meet-up	“
School Rep Training	23 Oct
STAR Protest	24 Oct
Dean’s Business Group	24 Oct
School Rep Training	24 Oct
Student Rep Meeting CED	25 Oct
BHM Event	27 Oct
AHSS Canvas Meeting	28 Oct
PG Rep Academy	“
Academic Board Pre Meet	“
Meeting with AHSS Faculty Officer	“
SU Council	“
PG Rep Academy	29 Oct
Student Engagement: Advice SU	“
Partnership posts: planning ahead meeting	30 Oct
Course Re Training	“
Student and Staff Partnership Group	“
Course Rep Forum: MHLS	“
BHM Event	“
Team Meeting	31 Oct
Meeting with Library Services	“
Course Rep Training	“