

Queen's University Belfast Students' Union
Full-Time Student Officer Annual Report

Role: Student Officer Equality and Diversity

Name: Sajid Khan

Introduction:

As Equality & Diversity Officer, my role is divided between making sure that internally, students are receiving a quality education regardless of any protected characteristics in equality legislation (e.g. age, race, gender etc.), and that externally students feel safe, welcome, and included in their communities no matter their identity.

This has been my first year as a Student Officer, and really my first year being properly involved in the student movement. Throughout this year I feel I have had the privilege of being able to work with the best people, who are committed everyday to improving the experience of students at Queen's and all students nationally. I have been fortunate enough to be a part of some of the most impactful things I have ever done and may ever do. I can't say it's been a perfect year, I feel I've learned a lot of lessons, both about how the job actually functions and how politics at this level needs to be practiced.

To quickly summarise, the summer was spent learning and planning for the first semester, and the first semester was spent throwing those plans out the window and getting new ones and the second semester was spent organising events, attending conferences and campaigning in the elections.

I spent the first half of my term just getting to grips with the role itself, meeting with people of influence in the areas I planned to work on and consulting with students who the work might impact.

The summer was kicked off strong with a USI lobby day in Dublin, in which we got to talk about important student issues with TDs at the Dáil. This was a very valuable experience and even though it was fairly centred on student issues in the republic, it still helped in building connections and taking back important knowledge and skills in how to work with politicians.

Freshers was an initially busy period, filled with events that the team helped to organise. The VP campaigns and I had planned to work on an event that would have acted a mock council, to get students engaged with council in a fun and less procedurally focused way. This ultimately got scrapped as we both felt the Freshers schedule had become too packed and we had both become too busy to put in the necessary work to build the event. During this period we also attended a number of protests in Belfast and in Dublin, centred on anti-racism, climate and student housing and funding.

October was focused on Black History Month and organising an event with the Afro-Caribbean Society. Ultimately it was decided that the best way to collaborate and help with the society was to help fund a movie night, with the choice of movie being decided by the society itself. Jordan Peele's 'Nope' was decided upon and the turnout for the event was great, filling out the CUBE.

Concurrent to these events, the situation in the Gaza needed addressing as it impacted students here and was also a resonant issue to students who may not be directly connected. The ongoing genocide raised questions surrounding the universities investments and the choice of Hillary Clinton as Chancellor considering her comments against a ceasefire. VP Campaigns and I wrote and submitted a motion to council, calling for a referendum to set the SU policy to oppose the Chancellor, fight for divestment from arms companies and to increase student membership on important university committees. In between the council passing the motion to have a referendum and the referendum itself taking place, the university senate voted on reappointing Hilary Clinton. Knowing this, I organised an impromptu protest to put pressure on the Senate to hear student voices, who throughout the whole process, had been excluded from consultation. Although senate voted in favour of reappointment, with the only dissenting voices coming from a students' union representative and student union president, who put forward a strong case for reconsidering and delaying the decision to reappoint. Whilst the outcome was disappointing, this galvanised the activist base involved in the campaign and the following weeks saw strong organising from campaigners to bring this issue to the forefront of students' minds. The referendum itself was a success and was very quickly followed up by a meeting with senior management, the SO team and concerned students.

Negotiations continued for months after, with the President bringing new versions of the proposed agreements to the team to be consulted on before meetings surrounding the referendum. Ultimately, we reached an agreement in late March. The agreement outlines the ways in which we will work towards getting the university to divest from the arms and fossil fuel industry, with bi-annual meetings on the subject. As well as being granted an extra seat and voting right on the planning and finance committee, and having the president on the committees that appoint and re-appoint chancellors. This will also coincide reform of the process of selecting chancellors, by getting them to sign principles by which they will undertake the role, to ensure that they best represent the views of staff and students at Queen's.

Second semester was largely dominated by organising events. In February I had LGBT History Month and EMpower to organise, attend and take part in. For more details on these events, feel free to look at my officer reports for the month of February. The elections then took up a lot of the attention of March, which unfortunately impacted my ability to organise for Seachtain Na Gailge, I had hoped to have more events on during the week but the lessons learned can be taken into next year when I won't have to rerun for my position. Ultimately, I felt the week was a success with an Irish language quiz hosted in collaboration with the An Cumann Gaelach and Irish dancers in the foyer of the union. The energy surrounding the irish language festivities felt really positive this year, marking a strong future for the irish language and encouraging students to use there Cúpla focal more often.

At the time of writing this annual report, the Parents and Carers Fund is yet to be announced but it will have a budget of £5,000 to be distributed to student parents and carer applicants who may need some short term assistance. Thanks to the UCU who contributed the money towards this project.

Ultimately, there is a lot missing from this report, it is hard to encapsulate every meeting, conference, policy and event worked on throughout the year. There is much I had intended to do, that I didn't end up working on enough this year, but much I had never intended to do, that I

am so proud to have worked on this year. It can be hard to demonstrate the value of building connections, particularly with other Students' Unions, as the fruits of those connections often don't bear in a single year. Similarly, it can be hard to explain how simply talking about an idea, may not initially provide anything material, but consistent pushing does yield results. Work in social justice areas, can often feel demoralising, it is caught at the whims of government and the culture and time which we live in. Nevertheless, the needle must be pushed.

Saoirse Don Phalaistín

Up the unions

Fuck the bosses