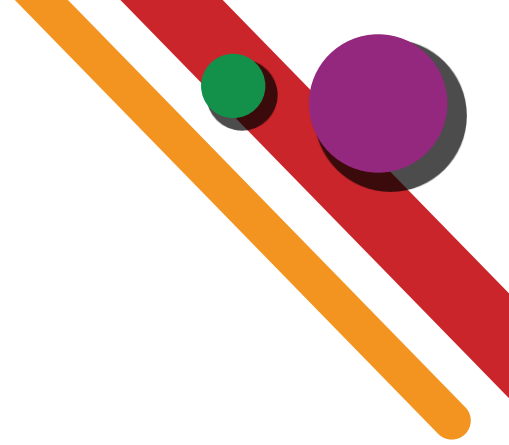




**SENEDD!**



# **Officer's Report**

**Senedd**

**4/11/2019**



## President's Summary:

It's been a very busy time at the Union. In July a new team of Sabbatical Officers came into office; we went through weeks of training, we attended the NUS Lead and Change conference as well as NUS Wales' Talwrn conference. The officer team has gone through a process of acclimatisation with their roles and work has now begun on a number of policies. The Union won the Officer Team of the Year 2019 award from NUS Wales; this year's officer team aims to win this award again for 2020.

So far in my role I have started working on a number of policies that are already active at the Union. The first policy I'm picking up from last year is about WiFi on campus, The policy states that we will lobby the University and other relevant parties to bring WiFi coverage to all the campus and to bring gigabit speeds onto campus. Then there are two policies about the environment which were passed at Senedd last year, One states that Aberystwyth Student Union should encourage Aberystwyth University to divest from fossil fuels. The second explains that the Student Union should also use renewable energy. I am also working on a policy that will involve the Student Union supporting People and Planet's Sweatshop Free Campaign. That includes getting the University to affiliate to Electronics Watch before the end of this academic year.

During freshers we ran a workshop at the Union with People and Planet about their campaign, and this was well received. I also organised and ran a live music event for freshers; it was well attended and people really enjoyed themselves, so it was great to be able to put the event on. I've been giving talks throughout freshers to international students, post grads, faculties and various departments to introduce myself, the union and to discuss the rep system. I worked at the really well received lock and key party, where I gave out prizes to students.

A recent development which I will be looking into in the next few weeks is the current situation with Spartacus. A large number of students on social media, through aberfess and other discussion groups, have raised concerns about the working conditions at Spartacus. A number of reports came out about employees not being paid, being shouted at regularly, being forced to work long hours doing repetitive unrewarding work and more. It's hard to know for sure if these instances are real, and so we are currently gathering information and finding the students that made these claims so that we can look into the accusations and potentially bring Spartacus in for a meeting to discuss this.



## **Employment and Recruitment in Aberystwyth.**

When it comes to recruitment at Spartacus, there were a large number of people that came forward with consistent accounts that all match up which describe the recruitment process at Spartacus. According to these students, the recruitment process involved a "trial period" where you would work in the role you were interviewing for and, depending on your performance, you'd either be offered the job after the trial shift or you'd be sent home. The concerning thing is that this "trial period" didn't last just for an hour or two, but was instead over the course of multiple shifts over multiple days, with groups all working to compete for the job. The common length of this "trial period" is said to last a week. The issue is that at the end of the trial, no one was paid for their work. This is concerning because usually you'd expect candidates to be paid for their labour whether your working as part of a trial or not. Either way, this has sparked major concern amongst the student body and people have been discussing boycotting Spartacus, making the university drop them as a supplier. A lot of negative attention and posts have been made about Spartacus already, which is damaging the reputation of the store. We asked our HR Consultants for advice on the claims made by students, and they got back to us with some information to provide context on what the legislation is around recruitment and unpaid shifts.

According to The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) the practice of requiring applicants to work an unpaid trial shift is not illegal, as long as the unpaid shift is part of a "genuine recruitment process" and as long as the shift does not last for more than a few hours. It should be possible to form a view as to whether a new employee is suitable for your business after a short trial of an hour or two.

ACAS advise that after this, if a candidate is asked to work a full shift or even multiple full shifts, then they should be paid the National Minimum Wage (NMW) for the hours worked. After a few hours, the relationship is more arguably an employment one and at that point it is safer to pay NMW. This seems to suggest that what happened at Spartacus is bad practice; those students asked to work full shifts, or even multiple shifts, should have been paid. Everyone who ended up not being paid, or not even getting the job, have a legitimate case.

The Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has recently published updated guidance for employers on calculating the NMW which includes guidance on unpaid trial shifts. The guidance makes it clear that HMRC will assess trial shifts on a case by case basis. It is important to look at whether the point of the trial is testing the individual's suitability for recruitment or to provide value to the employer. If the



individual is required to work a whole shift or a series of shifts then this is likely to be of value to the employer and therefore the NMW will be due. Equally if the individual is not observed or given any guidance during the trial then it is more likely that s/he is providing work for which the NMW should be paid. HMRC will also look at whether the length of the trial was proportionate to the need to test the individual's ability.

For example, it might be reasonable to ask a teacher to be in school for a whole day and to teach various lessons under observation. It is unlikely to be proportionate to ask an applicant for a bar job to work a whole Saturday night shift unsupervised. If an individual is asked to work in a simulated environment for a short amount of time e.g. a chef is asked to produce taster dishes then this is unlikely to attract the NMW.

HMRC will take action where they believe workers are being exploited under the cover of recruitment. If you wish to make payment, it is perfectly acceptable to pay a candidate cash in hand for the hours they work, and then give them a self-reporting certificate so that the individual is responsible for any tax or NI that may be due.

It is good practice to:

- inform a candidate about how long the trial period is going to last
- tell a candidate what they will be expected to do on the trial shift
- make sure the applicant understands that the trial shift is unpaid
- keep written evidence of this in case of a subsequent HMRC audit.

Please note once you offer a job to an applicant, you must ensure that they receive the NMW once they start working for you. The NMW calculation is made over a pay reference period, and you will need to ensure that the hourly rate does not fall below the NMW in the first pay reference period because of the unpaid trial shift that the employee worked, or induction or training sessions that they attended. So based on this, we are currently going through the process of finding students who experienced the recruitment process at Spartacus, and we'll likely be speaking to the owner about these claims too.

## QSU Award

During my presidency so far, I was fortunate to be able to go to London to receive the Quality Student Union certification we were awarded, along with a handful of other institutions, in recognition of our compliance with the strict guidelines set by NUS and certified institutions for the QSU accreditation. The Union has gone through a transition over the past few years and this award recognises the good progress made by staff and students over that time. This achievement made it into a few newspapers, which is excellent for our public relations as a Union.



## Recruitment and Training

We've had a number of internal staff changes over the summer; we have a new opportunities manager and a new sports co-ordinator, we are currently in the process of recruiting a new advisor for our advice service and we are hiring a new member of staff to work in reception and finance. These changes will hopefully strengthen the team we have at the Union.

Staff went through training over the summer in a range of different areas; in particular resilience training as well as suicide prevention training were run very successfully this year. Staff have noted the benefits they are already experiencing as a result of receiving this training, so this is something we are likely to continue to run for staff and student staff. Sabbatical Officers went through Trustee training which was run with colleagues from Trinity St David's Student Union and Bangor Students' Union. Representatives from NUS were also present; this training shared best practice for Trustees and the session was well received by our officer team.



# SENEDD!



The officer team also went through NUS training at conferences. We attended the NUS Lead and Change conference in Leeds, as well as NUS Wales' Talwrn conference in Cardiff.

In Leeds, we were able to network with officers from Unions across the UK; we shared ideas of best practice, and we discussed issues that we face on our campuses. We identified the main issues that we shared with different Universities and we learned techniques for running campaigns, negotiating with our institutions and making change. In Cardiff, we had great opportunities to share and discuss things with our counterparts from other institutions in Wales. We identified more issues we shared in common across our campuses. We also had a live public consultation with members of Welsh government over PCET Reform; we were informed of the proposed changes and we discussed the reform in depth. We also had a great chance to discuss with the Education Minister for Wales some of the developments within the HE and FE sector. In particular we focused on the Mental Health and Wellbeing bid that we are a part of. We also spoke to her about the future of Erasmus and we confirmed that the UK government ran a cost/benefit analysis of the Erasmus programme, and they apparently found that the programme did not provide the UK with value for money and so we are unsure if the government will run a similar programme themselves or if Erasmus is to be shelved forever.



## Freshers' Week

Freshers' week has been a success, especially when compared to last year; general thoughts and comments amongst the student body about Freshers' Events are overwhelmingly positive. People seemed to have fun, we had great feedback from the free events we ran, with students asking us to run these types of events again or to run them regularly. This is good, as it establishes a positive relationship between the student body and the Union, but it also means that people's initial opinions of the University are positive which is good.

We'd like to extend our thanks to the Bar staff at the Union for being excellent in helping us run freshers' week, helping to set up the main room for the fair and for events, and sorting out prizes for some of the night-time events. I'd also like to thank John Glasby and the rest of commercial services for helping to organise and run a live music event which was well received by students. Hopefully we can run more student events throughout the year with the help of the Bar.

At the big quiz, after we gave out the prizes and the quiz ended, we asked everyone to raise their hands if they'd like us to run the quiz again in a month's time. The response was overwhelmingly positive with almost everyone raising their hands. The quiz was so well attended that we packed out the main room, the cwtsh bar and the picture-house, so the whole of the Union building was packed full of students.





## **Strategy at the SU**

This academic year, the Student Union will be reviewing and updating our strategy. We will be having a strategy away day with staff, sabbatical officers and student representatives and we will be forming a new strategy. Then we will consult with students on our strategy before implementing. Cat Sullivan from Mira Gold will be helping us formulate our strategy; she has a wealth of experience and knowledge and was formerly working at NUS UK.

## **Membership for Clubs and Societies**

Membership and sign up to clubs and societies is up on last year; we are pleased to announce that we have over 1,000 active members of team Aber and we have had really positive feedback from students and societies about this year's SU fair compared to last year. We are looking at setting up an Extinction Rebellion student group to bring together the already existing environment and eco societies. This group will hopefully organise events and inform students of ways they can get involved with non-violent direct action or through lobbying to influence change.



## The Union and NSS.

NSS results were strong from a University perspective however for the Union this year we struggled especially against Bangor Students' Union who rose a significant number places in the NSS results in comparison to last year. Below in Figure 1 is a table that shows the financial history for Bangor Students' Union for the past few years up until 2018 (Source: Charity Commission). Since then the Students' Union in Bangor has changed its legal structure and re-registered with the Charities Commission for 2019.

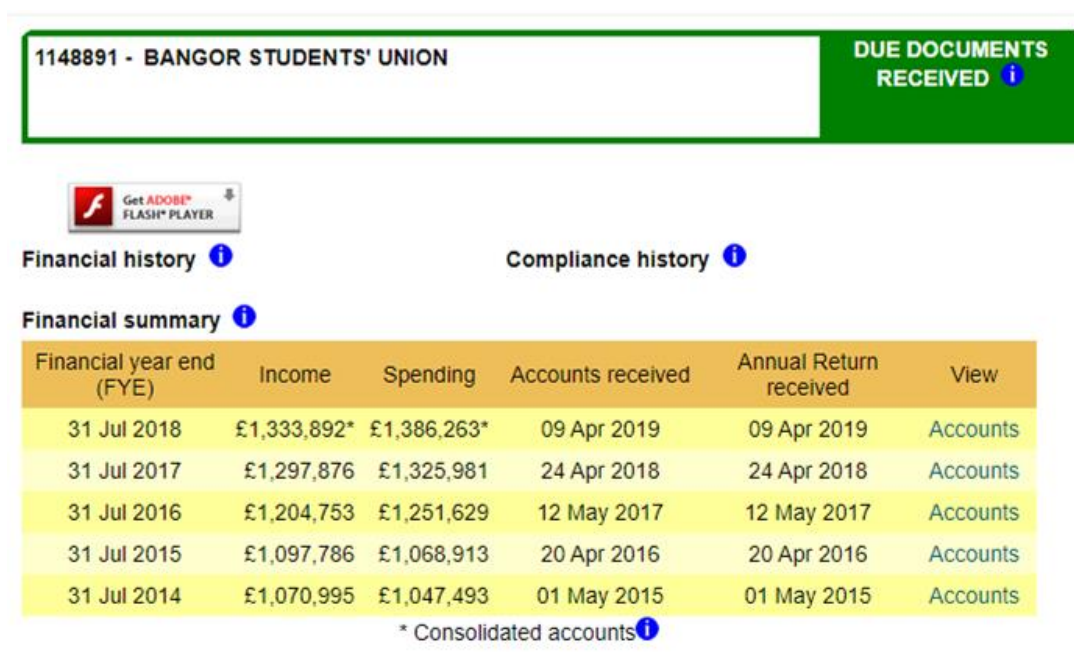


Figure 1: Showing Bangor Students' Union Financial history from 2014 to 2018.

Source: The Charity Commission [Online] (Accessed 30/09/2019)

The Table in Figure 1 shows income and expenditure which have both steadily risen at Bangor year by year as time has gone on. In comparison, our Student Union here in Aberystwyth has seen a steady decline in both income and expenditure over the same period as shown in Figure 2. I understand there are a complicated number of factors and variables that have contributed to this outcome, and this doesn't fully explain the disparity between our NSS results. However, it does show that as a Union we have been through a significant amount of change, and so for us to be able to still compete and be recognised for our achievements is great.



1150576 - ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION

DUE DOCUMENTS  
RECEIVED



Financial history

Compliance history

Financial summary

Financial year end (FYE)	Income	Spending	Accounts received	Annual Return received	View
30 Jun 2018	£1,268,469*	£1,173,456*	03 Apr 2019	20 May 2019 (20 days late)	Accounts
30 Jun 2017	£1,823,394*	£1,380,611*	26 Apr 2018	26 Apr 2018	Accounts
30 Jun 2016	£2,530,714*	£2,708,378*	23 Mar 2017	23 Mar 2017	Accounts
30 Jun 2015	£2,738,871*	£2,856,901*	22 Feb 2016	24 Feb 2016	Accounts
30 Jun 2014	£2,781,599*	£2,794,657*	22 Feb 2016 (298 days late)	24 Feb 2016 (300 days late)	Accounts

\* Consolidated accounts

Figure 2: Showing Aberystwyth University Students' Union Financial history from 2014 to 2018.

Source: The Charity Commission [Online] (Accessed 30/09/2019)

Ideally, from this year forward we'd like to now see our income and spending rise steadily at least in line with inflation if not by marginally more. This is likely to help us continue to do the great work we do here at the union that is recognised nationally. The QSU verifiers that inspected our union last quarter said that we have a Union and team to be proud of and that we exceeded their expectations during their time in Aber. I think a union of this quality should receive proper funding because so much more can be achieved for our students.



## **Wellbeing Update – Lydia Chilvers**

Over the last few months as Wellbeing Officer I have been working on our 'No Excuses' campaign that was created by my predecessor Molly, which is a pledge to work together to educate each other on and challenge instances of bullying, harassment and violence to create a Zero Tolerance culture. I have been working on a 'No Excuses' training session that I am going to be running with clubs' and societies' committees, to educate them on how to identify different types of unacceptable behaviour and how to help their club/soc members, if they need it. At the end of the session the committee will be invited to sign the 'No Excuses' pledge on behalf of the club/soc. Also, Welsh Women's Aid are going to be running two bystander training sessions in November that any students are welcome to come to. In the new year I am hoping to invite representatives from pubs/clubs in town to come in for bystander training with WWA as well as some 'No Excuses' training, in the hope that I'll be able to get a wide variety of venues from town to sign the pledge and improve the safety of our students on nights out.

As well as No Excuses, I have also been working on some environmental focused priorities. I am hoping to set up a community fridge at the SU this year, with the help from Aber Food Surplus. This will be a place where surplus food will be kept, that is free for anyone who needs it. This will help to reduce food waste on campus and also hopefully help any students that might be short of money. Also, Dhan and I have been in contact with Aberystwyth Extinction Rebellion and we are hoping to soon have an XR youth group up and running at the university. XR are also going to be helping us with getting the university to commit to divesting from fossil fuels. Lastly, I have been looking into the university's waste management system in regards to the compostable packaging that is used. As the university doesn't have compost bins on campus, this means that there isn't any ideal place for the compostable packaging to be disposed. I am currently looking into whether getting some compost bins on campus would be a feasible option.

## **Opportunities Update – Wojtek Salski**

So far, as the Opportunities Officer I achieved confirmation regarding "BUCS Wednesdays Policy", which will hopefully work well in this academic year. I have also planned out a new Opportunities Officer event called "Aber Challenge" and managed to convince thirteen students to start their own societies and clubs, therefore raising the engagement level within the SU.



## **Academic Affairs Update – Chloe Ann Wilkinson-Silk**

Since July, as Academic Affairs Officer I have primarily worked toward two main goals: lobbying for the protection of ERASMUS+ post-Brexit, and developing a better understanding among staff and students about the values of the academic representation system. Below are the details of my progression in these areas.

### **Academic and Faculty Representatives**

In collaboration with the Academic and Volunteer Coordinator, we have made significant progress on the implementation of many standardised processes at both department and faculty representative level. To do this, we have:

- Coined a new key mission statement for the role of a representative, to be used in representative training and on all SU communications with the aim of clarifying the purpose of the representation system
- Circulated a staff and students 'representative expectations' to clarify the role of a faculty rep to all relevant parties
- Created a standardised SSCC template to be circulated across all academic departments
- Drafted a revised SSCC 'terms of reference' to ensure relevant parties are in attendance across academic departments and held accountable to do so (in progress)
- Arranged for an SSCC review to be a standing item at all Faculty Academic Affairs Committees (FAAC)
- Arranged for Faculty Representative business to be a standing item at all Faculty Academic Affairs Committees (FAAC)
- Scheduled one to one meetings with Faculty Representatives prior to their FAAC to review SSCC minutes and identify key issues
- Drafted an 'SSCC key summary' template to be submitted to FAAC by Faculty representatives

The goal in standardising such structures is to ensure that any feedback collated and progressed by our academic representatives can be easily recorded, and any 'wins' by students can be celebrated. We wish to have a much better understanding of the input our reps have across the university this year, so that we may shout about their good work and increase their value in the eyes of Aberystwyth University as a whole.

### **ERASMUS+ Post Brexit**

In 2017 students passed SU policy mandating the Academic Affairs Officer to lobby at all levels for the protection of ERASMUS+ post Brexit. This year, I have made it my priority to run a visible and widespread campaign encouraging students to take an active lead on delivering this message. To do this I have launched the 'Purple



Postbox Project', a lobbying campaign encouraging staff, students and alumni of Aberystwyth University to sign and send postcards to MP's across the UK asking that ERASMUS+ be considered in all Brexit discussions at this crucial time. For this campaign I have:

- Drafted and designed postcards with our message to send to MP's across the country
- Created editable campaign resource templates, to be sent to and adopted by universities across the UK who also wish to take part
- Created a bilingual campaign web-page accessibly outlining the potential impact Brexit may have on ERASMUS+ and how students may engage with the campaign
- Written a 'letter to my MP' to be uploaded to the website prior to sending postcards to the House of Commons
- Created a wufoo submission form embedded in our website allowing students, staff and alumni to submit open or anonymous testimonials outlining their positive experiences of international study
- Collaborated with a documentary film-maker to create a short mini-series addressing the importance of ERASMUS+ to Welsh institutions and the possible impact of losing access to the program
- Collaborated with the international office to receive frequent updates on international mobility and share resources for international student support structures through the campaign
- Collaborated with Aberystwyth ERASMUS+ Student Network to run campaign stalls, share relevant contacts and information and encourage ERASMUS+ students across the world to participate in the campaign
- Had contact with representative MP for Ceredigion, Ben Lake, to arrange an open round table discussion w/c the 14<sup>th</sup>, allowing students to ask questions and receive updates on international mobility and how it is currently being affected

Over the summer, I have also attended various training sessions with my fellow officers, attended many meetings getting to know my new colleagues within the university. I also began work toward achieving my other two priorities: to review module accreditation and improve off-campus access to university resources.



# SENEDD!

## **UMCA – Tomos Ifan**

UMCA ran a string of events for freshers' week, and overcame many obstacles regarding our events to ensure students were still able to enjoy and meet new people through the medium of Welsh, which is very important for new students arriving in Aberystwyth. One of our most successful events was a Welsh performing band in the Llew Du, that attracted a large crowd of Welsh speakers from across Wales, including locals (which ultimately works toward the town and gown relationship).

As UMCA president, I sit on the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol board representing Aberystwyth Welsh speaking students. In October UMCA are teaming up with Swansea in leading and presenting a paper on Welsh modules to the Coleg, in a bid to increase the number of lectures that are held in Welsh.

Lastly, this year UMCA and Aberystwyth will be hosting the yearly 'Ddawns Ryngol' and the 'Eisteddfod Ryngol' which only happens once every five years. I am working hard towards ensuring both events runs smoothly and successfully in order to represent Aberystwyth University at its very best.