

## **Aber SU Feb Report**

This report is an update on developments at the SU since the last report to Senedd in November and the AGM report in December. Included in this report is an update from each officer on their area of work. This report will also feature insights from the opportunities team and the advice service so to understand some of the important work that goes on to support students and activities at the SU.

### **President Summary - Dhan**

I've decided to include a wider breadth of information about the Student Union's activities. Included are updates from the SU advice service, Volunteering work, Opportunities office and from the CEO. The reason is to give you a deeper insight into all the work that goes on at the SU. We have a lot of major events coming up this semester, Superteams has launched successfully, Aber7s is on the way and this year we've seen a sharp rise in student led events happening at the SU such as Bollywood Night which is becoming a popular regular feature. Engagement with SU activities is at an all-time high and we've seen a lot more interest this year with students getting involved with union activities. The SU has seen an increase this year in memberships for societies and clubs but there is also an increase in the number of candidates standing in the upcoming SU elections which shows an engaged student body that wants to be involved with our work.

The University's decision to divestment from fossil fuels has been well received by students and partner organisations, SOS UK, People and Planet and Aberystwyth XR Student and Local groups have been elated with the news and students see the university taking a step in the right direction. I look forward to sitting on the University's Environment and Sustainability Committee to continue seeing progress from the University on its decarbonisation strategy. In terms of sustainability Senedd passed a policy that mandates the SU to lobby the University to Affiliate to Electronics Watch, I think it's a great initiative, a great cause with good purpose, it benefits the University by giving an audit to our Supply Chain and can improve our score in the Green Universities Rankings where we sit at 84th which lags behind compared to Bangor who sits at 20th in the Rankings and Swansea who sit at 9th next to major metropolitan city based Universities such as University of Bristol and Aston University. As a University by the coast, surrounded by nature, with major departments such as IBERS and Geography full of students passionate about the environment it is about time we stopped lagging behind in this area.

We will be hosting the NUS Wales Conference where hundreds of delegates from all over Wales will gather to discuss policies and decide on what the national union should work on.

## **SU Advice provision**

Our Advice Service has one full time Advisor and due to staff turnover we've been operating the service through our support and Representation Manager as part of his role for most of the first term. Despite only having a full-time Advisor since November, our much in demand advice service has had 1081 student advice touchpoints through information and direct casework. A major challenge for our service is that we offer the only independent source of advice and support in relation to any University issue, which could include accommodation disputes, owing money, academic progression or disciplinary action or behavioural concerns. In addition to academic specialism we provide support and advice around money, private accommodation, complaints, personal challenges and also acts as a general listening ear to a range of unsupported students (students with additional considerations such as disabilities or social challenges) who need a drop in service with no triage or barriers. The capacity of the service is a huge challenge in terms of delivery and also promotion to students. We believe that our Advice service should be promoted as a first point of contact for students in difficulty, however we are limited in the ways in which we can physically promote our advice work, for example in welcome talks I was asked to give, the SU gets around 5 to 10 minutes to talk about every aspect of the SU whereas Student Support get around 20 minutes just to talk about their service. However that being said we are wary of how much we can further promote the service given the resources available and ideally we need at least one more full-time Advisor to be able to meet even existing student demand (we are also mindful that Nursing and veterinary students have complex needs and are arriving soon).

## **Recruitment and staff changes**

The Students' Union is primarily supported by:

- 5 Full-time elected Officers
- 13 Full-time staff
- 3 student staff (working on reception)

The Students' Union is independent from the University and as such our staff are not University employees and operate on different terms and conditions and pay scale (which does not correlate with the University grading system). We've had a period of staff change over throughout the last year which has resulted in some salary savings but also meant that the work of those roles has been picked up by the remaining staff in the interim, for example, our reception was covered entirely by our existing staff on a rota basis. We are excited to have welcomed a new Sports Coordinator, Opportunities Manager, Societies Coordinator, Student Advisor and will be recruiting for a Student Voice Coordinator further in the year.

We have one PT Communications and Engagement Manager who is responsible for our Communications channels so individual departments are responsible for coordinating their own website content articles, social media and physical promotion such as posters etc.

A major resource challenge for us also comes in terms of supporting events and activities for clubs or societies or just in general. We would love to be able to coordinate more community building events and programme based activities such as meet and greets, non-alcohol socials, trips, coffee mornings, etc. However, currently all our staff are at capacity with their current objectives and work and so adding in any activity beyond that which we currently provide places a large amount of pressure usually at peak times.

This year we have been working with Chwarae Teg to achieve their Fairplay Employer Award and we are proud of the work completed to ensure we meet our high expectations around equality and diversity.

## **Union Finance**

Our finance service not only manages and coordinates payments and income through our staff and core activity, we are also responsible for the finances of our 150 Clubs and Societies. Our team of two members of staff supports the financial transactions and accounts of 150 student groups which includes all of their spending and income and tracking and signing off all expenditure to ensure we're operating with charity law and handling all of their financial queries. All Club and Society memberships and sales of any products or events are managed through the website which only staff can administrate. The SU also absorbs all of the transaction charges for Clubs and Societies electronic payments rather than passing them back to Clubs and Societies as we want to encourage minimal cash handling and storage by students.

## Student Opportunities

Our Opportunities work is supported by three full-time staff members and The Students' Union is entirely responsible for the support and activity of all University competitive and non-competitive sports clubs, shared interest and academic societies (which we group as Tim Aber). This includes arranging transport, teams and kit for all Inter-University games and each year our teams travel more than twice the way around the world to represent the University.

Clubs and Societies are led by around 650 volunteer committee members. Key committee role holders are trained the week before the big welcome weekend on how to navigate the SU support, our expectations of them, how to use the website and Communications good practice, finance processes and restrictions and where identified as needed we also provide Risk Assessment and First Aid training.

We also coordinate 3 main events that are really popular with our current and former students. Varsity, Superteams and Aber 7's all take place over the next couple of months at weekends and will use our whole staff team and a large number of A-Team volunteers to deliver successfully.

There are a range of challenges around our Clubs and Societies work. Currently, 43% of students are in Team Aber and part of a number of Clubs and Societies. Ideally we want everyone to join a club or a society and as participation increases it is becoming increasingly more challenging to be able to provide a high quality support service that encourages group development to meet student needs and wants.

The sheer diversity and activity of groups is difficult to support and we are mindful that some activity is more risky than others from a health and safety perspective such as activity on the sea or that might be physically testing of high physical contact. In addition to managing these health and safety risks we are now also categorising groups in terms of reputational/political risk. As we grow activity we are also growing the complexity of groups and activity too. We now provide Clubs and Societies volunteers with access to our Employee Assistance Programme but cannot yet offer this to all members. The Opportunities Team are frequently approached by students to resolve a range of conflicts or dramas that may be present in a group or that relate to their personal lives. While the team is more than happy to signpost they want to make sure that they are approachable and give the initial time to listen. This all adds up and affects capacity overall.

Many of our student groups also require a range of travel considerations which provide additional challenges for the SU. With a restricted budget we are only able to provide coach travel for a limited number of Sports Clubs. There are no minibus hire companies locally and instead we have a small range of lease vehicles that group members who meet strict criteria can drive or alternatively groups need to rely on their own member own vehicles. We provide familiarisation checks etc but cannot offer more than a basic introduction to the relevant policies and the vehicles themselves and would like to be able to simply put more students on organised driven transport.

We are also overspending a small amount on our BUCS budget each year to enable each possible inter University team to compete. This year we will have to face the difficult choice of which teams we will need to cut from the league if we are not able to source additional funding. We believe this would be a shame as we know that playing competitively with other University teams adds to the broader University experience and we believe that reducing the teams competing may impact some students' choice of University.

## **Volunteering**

The SU has worked hard to expand student volunteering work over the last 3 years. Our Aber Award for volunteering is now in its third year and we now support students to access opportunities and record their activity and hours in an online hub. We also coordinate a range of one off events including a number of beach cleans, dolphin watching dementia friends, painted a nursery garden, tree planting, bird counting in the VCs garden, and we're about to host our third elderly tea party. We're about to team up with Bangor to run a large scale tree planting project. We're really proud of the benefit to the students involved in terms of skills development, making friends and in promoting positive wellbeing. We also feel that this kind of activity builds positive links with the broader community. So far this year around 250 volunteers have completed almost 5,000 hours of volunteering activity that has benefited their peers or the local community.

One major challenge in developing volunteering is staff capacity to support the expansion and provision. Our volunteering work is delivered as part of a staff members role who also deals with academic representation whereas in an ideal world we would be able to dedicate a whole staff member to focus on each aspect of the role.

Whilst we have been successful at finding a range of opportunities we would like to be able to identify more and our projects will need to consider further distances in terms of travel and access to opportunities. We are also limited in our ability to follow up and offer some supervisory personal contact with volunteers and our scope to identify and develop key skills. We are conscious that growing student engagement with volunteering opportunities is part of the University strategy and we would like to be able to ensure the highest quality service.

## Environment and Sustainability

This year there has been major work around Environment and Sustainability priorities, the policy on Divestment has made significant progress and is headed towards completion. The University has created a committee for Environment and Sustainability and Lydia, Wellbeing Officer and the SU President will sit in that committee. We hope we can contribute to the Universities' Decarbonisation strategy to help get us to where we need to be.

Moving forward there are a number of key Sustainability policies that have made significant progress this year such as the sustainable palm oil policy and the Sweatshop Free Campaign policy.

The Sweatshop Free Campaign has been very popular amongst students who had organised workshops on this issue with people and planet and created a policy which passed with overwhelming success in student Senedd and which passed again at the AGM.

The policy itself is shown below.

This Union Notes:

1. That the global electronics industry is a high-risk industry for modern slavery.
2. That the UK Modern Slavery Act (2015) seeks to address slavery, forced labour and human trafficking taking place today. On 29 October 2015, the transparency in supply chains provisions of the Act (section 54) came into force. The provisions require commercial and public interest organisations, including universities, to publish a statement setting out steps the organisation has taken to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not taking place in any of its supply chains and in any part of its own business, often referred to as an "anti-slavery statement".
3. That, according to the International Labour Organization, around 25 million men, women and children around the world are in a form of forced labour. Globally, there are 5.4 victims of modern slavery for every 1,000 people, and 1 in 4 victims of modern slavery are children (i).
4. That the electronics industry is a high-risk industry for modern slavery. Sadly, these conditions are common in the electronics and technology, mining and minerals and shipping industries.
5. That Electronics Watch (EW) is a European-wide labour rights monitoring organization, conducting investigations of working conditions in factories around the globe. Their primary focus is the labour practices of factories that make electronics goods (ii).
6. That, since its formation in 2013, 52 UK Universities have affiliated to Electronics Watch, including every publicly-funded University in Scotland.
7. This means that all electronics suppliers to those University affiliates are now monitored for labour rights practices in their supply chains.
8. That, while this is a great step forward, our University is also a major purchaser of electronics.

This Union Believes:

1. That our University should also monitor its supply chains.
2. The affiliation of universities to EW has enabled workers to have a number of major successes in defending their rights.
3. That EW is the only monitoring organisation that is credible with workers and their organisations, and is explicitly dedicated to monitoring university and public authority supply chains.
4. That more universities affiliating will lead to a greater collective weight of purchasers in dealing with labour rights abuses in the electronics sector.
5. That the University should affiliate to EW.

This Union Resolves:

1. To mandate the FTO team to lobby the University to affiliate to EW.
2. To mandate the FTO team to request student representation on all of the University's purchasing committees.
3. To mandate student representatives who sit on purchasing committees to push affiliation to EW.
4. To mandate all student representatives who sit on the purchasing committees to push for more ethical and more sustainable electronics from University procurement managers.

i Reference: International Labour Organisation, Forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking, <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang--en/index.htm>

ii Reference: Electronics Watch, <http://electronicswatch.org/en>

## **Disability Areas**

Students have voted for a policy to lobby the University to improve its disability areas. This includes disabled access in department buildings and all across campus. The policy is a proposal to fix the already built lift systems, and also to ensure the safety of the lifts within certain lecture halls. Having a place for those who cannot access causes many problems especially during the winter if they are using electric chairs. This is an easy fix of looking at the university and seeing where the improvements can be made. Example is the blue lifts outside of the student union are constantly out of service and unavailable for many to use.

This issue was raised at council in Feb and Stephen Forster in the Executive team has been in correspondence about finding these cases where disability facilities are lacking and the University will seek to remedy those issues and fix these facilities. The University is taking this policy very seriously, around 18% of our students have a declared disability so it's important that our campus is accessible and that there are sufficient facilities to support all our students.

## **Wellbeing Update - Lydia Chilvers**

Since coming back from Christmas I have been busy preparing things for the busy upcoming months. For example, it is LGBTQ+ history month and I have been preparing an exhibition about the non-binary around the world, which will be displayed during the second half of the month.

I am also running 'Februhairy', which is a campaign that encourages women to not shave their body for the whole month of February and is one of my priorities I set for the year. I am running this campaign as it is something that is close to my heart and the main aim is to break down the gender stereotype that women should have hairless bodies. I would love for more women to feel comfortable about being hairy and for more women to feel empowered to grow their body hair by seeing other women embrace their natural side. Also, alongside this I am hoping to raise money for Welsh Women's Aid, a domestic abuse charity who support AberSU by providing us with free bystander intervention training for students.

I have also been making plans for This Girl Can week, which is the first week of March. We are going to be holding a conference of talks by local inspirational women on the Monday evening, I'll be leading a reclaim the night march on the Tuesday evening, Vagina monologues will be performed on the Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights, I will hopefully be doing a big bloody brunch one day and there will be women only gym classes and training sessions throughout the week.

As for my other priorities, we have had progress in regards to the community fridge as the space we plan to use has been cleared out, so now we need to look at getting the place decorated and hygiene rated. I am currently looking into different options for funding. One of my other priorities was to get compost bins put on campus for Vegware packaging but soon realised that it would be impractical at the moment due to their not being any composting facilities in Wales that can process Vegware packaging. So, I am currently drafting up a letter to send to council asking whether some composting facilities could be updated, as a large percentage of businesses now use Vegware packaging but it is being sent to general waste rather than composted as it should be.

In term one I ran a few No Excuses training sessions for club and societies committees and am now looking to carry on with this in term 2. Also, I am looking at how to engage university staff with the pledge.



## Opportunities Update - Wojciech Salski

As the end of the year approached and reached 2020 I have worked on multiple projects and events with the Opportunities Office as well as the other SU departments and external organizations. Below I am presenting an up to date report comprising all of the progress and actions taken through the past three months.

Before breaking for Christmas holidays I assisted in the organization of the “Staying in Aber for Christmas” event, which enabled students, who are not leaving for vacation to their families, to get to know others in a similar situation and find a company for these celebratory days to come. Students were each given a gift (TimAber beanie hat) as well as informed on the events happening in town through the Christmas period.

With February in mind, the Opportunities Office has been working intensively on the preparation of Superteams 2020. As the Opportunities Officer, I am responsible for gathering volunteers, referees, and hiring photographers as well as preparation of three major events of the weekend. I have been in touch with the Academy bar in town, working towards their organization of the Women's Superteams after party, but I can now confirm that the event will be taking place in the Aberystwyth FC venue instead. I have prepared the lists of participants (volunteers, referees and photographers) and with help from my fellow officers and SU staff, I have created gym test and ‘mystery event’ disciplines. It is worth mentioning that the ‘mystery event’ will include 13 team challenges for students, such as the inflatable obstacle course, carrying ‘wounded’ teammates and problem-solving exercises. As I have taken on the opportunity to create a promotional video of the event for the years to come, I will be taking shots through the event and with the help of fellow Film Studies students I am planning to deliver an advertising video afterwards. We are currently looking into drone operator hire (price of 300 pounds for two Sundays) to film from the air the ‘mystery event’, but I have not yet secured funds for this option.

The second major event to come is Varsity 2020 Aber vs Bangor which will take place in Bangor University. Opportunities Office is working in cooperation with Bangor SU Opportunities Department, organizing the event. My responsibilities connected with the event are as follows: photographers hire, support of the Opportunities team and creation of the Varsity 2020 promotional video. I have given a Film Studies student an opportunity to work alongside me in the creation of the video, which TimAber, as well as Aberystwyth University, will be able to use to promote the event and the Aberystwyth University team. We are currently in the second week of shooting the material (video aims to feature all participating student groups and motivate the student body to victory over Bangor teams) and I have already secured funding for drone operator hire, which will enrich the quality of the promotion. I am expecting to deliver the ‘rough cut’ before the 18th of February, with the final version ready to use before the end of the month.

In the past months, I have been looking into the organization of a few smaller and quite new events. With the visible willingness from some student groups I am going to organize, *This Girl Can Week*, *Earth Week* and *One World Week* events. During *This Girl Can* week female students will be able to participate in open classes run by the Sports Centre and TimAber clubs. There will also be a fair, possible open discussion event and a few other activities, which are organized by Lydia – Wellbeing Officer. For Earth Week I have contacted WWF charity as well as the WWF student group and we are currently in the process of planning out the possible activities, which could take place throughout the week. The aim is to organize a quiz, environment focused fair and a fundraising campaign. WWF has given me materials, films and offered assistance in gathering funds towards charities. WWF society are going to get in touch with other societies and we will be sure of what activities will take place closer to April. When it comes to One World Week I am planning to organize a Quiz, informational stand and possible activities ran by international student groups. This is as well to be confirmed in time.

On a side note I am happy to announce that we have now three more student groups, which were just recently set up by multiple students. Economics society, French society and Judo club have joined the TimAber family and are now available for students to join. This is yet another small step towards the goal of extending the reach of TimAber for all students to fit in.

We are also working with the NUS Wales in organisation of the NUS Wales Conference here in Aber. This is for us – Officers, a chance to present our Quiz running abilities and host the Conference in a professional style.

Overall I am certain that as it stands the Opportunities Office and wider SU team have been very busy and worked hard over the past months to deliver great results. My focus shifts day by day as the deadlines come closer. Currently the most important tasks of mine are running successfully Superteams events, creation of Varsity Promo and preparation of Conference Quiz. With focus and perseverance all will come as planned.

**Academic Affairs Update - Chloe Wilkinson-Silk**

## UMCA and Welsh Culture

### Update from Tomos Ifan

Since the last meeting UMCA has held a number of successful events for refreshers week and working to hold the inter-collegiate Eisteddfod here in Aberystwyth on the weekend of 14 March. The Eisteddfod will be an event where 5 universities across Wales will be competing in stage and sport competitions across the weekend with up to 400 students attending. Pantycelyn is an important issue that receives a lot of attention. I have worked very closely with Rhodri Llwyd Morgan in order to plan the best way to advertise and create a buzz about Pantycelyn. We have chosen two pathways, the first being to contact former presidents and 'well-known' students who had stayed in Pantycelyn to create a series of blogs and videos explaining what was so attractive to stay there. The second pathway up was to have regular meetings between the UMCA Committee, myself and Rhodri to discuss ideas and see the building's progress. In addition to this, we will include the new UMCA committee immediately once they are elected to keep the momentum going. Other events that UMCA have on the horizon include a Welsh language week where we hope to create posters/an exhibition explaining the story of the 'Cofiwch Dryweryn' wall and its importance, selling Welsh cakes and sharing the recipes of Welsh Foods in the Union. We will also have a RAG week that is being organised by our RAG officers where we collect money for a good cause.