



UNDEB ABERYSTWYTH
Annual Student Experience Report
2025-26

Written by Undeb Aberystwyth

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Introduction

Undeb Aberystwyth is invited to annually provide a report on student perceptions of Aberystwyth University services, as well as an overview of the student experience throughout the academic year. We are pleased to present this report on behalf of Aberystwyth University students.

Led by students and supported by a dedicated team of staff, the Students' Union aims to ensure that Aberystwyth students love student life, that they are happy, healthy and empowered, with lasting friendships and promising futures.

The student voice is central to this report, drawing on a variety of information sources, including regular insights, student conversations, and feedback, along with previous annual quality statements submitted to the University Council.

We have organised our report into six key areas:

- Academic Representation
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment and Feedback
- Support and Guidance
- Facilities and Resources
- Employability and Development

We express our gratitude to our students, Academic Representatives, elected officers, and staff who contributed to the creation of this report. We also commend Aberystwyth University for its ongoing commitment to collaboration with Undeb Aberystwyth in enhancing the student experience.

We would also like to acknowledge that the University is still experiencing financial challenges affecting the higher education sector. We recognise that some matters may remain unresolved because of these difficult circumstances, and that progress on the recommendations we suggest may proceed more slowly as a result.

Progress Against 2025 Recommendations

The 2024-25 Annual SU Submission contained fifteen recommendations. This section relates to progress against those recommendations.

Academic Representation

Recommendation 1: Undeb Aberystwyth would like to highlight the importance of Academic Reps having the opportunity to connect with their cohort prior to scheduled teaching sessions. This is essential for students to identify their representatives, offer feedback, and know whom to approach for support and communication.

Update: Some Academic Reps have been given time to talk at Department induction talks and in general departments have been better at giving time for reps to introduce themselves to their cohorts. However, this is not standardised or guaranteed.

Recommendation 2: Undeb Aberystwyth values the importance of collaboration with Aberystwyth University, believing that we are stronger when working together to represent the student voice. In this regard, we recommend reviewing the "student voice system" (including SSCCs, TUN, etc.) to develop our relationships, foster greater cohesion between our organisations and to avoid duplication of effort and resource use.

Update: Tell us Now has now closed following departmental and university structural changes. In addition to our usual SU term 1 survey, the SU worked with the University to develop the existing University Induction survey and then provided the results to the University which worked well. The new staff responsible have been meeting with the SU and we are working collaboratively to consider how things could work in the future with the SU and University having clear roles and avoiding duplication.

Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 1: Emphasise the importance of accessible teaching to academic staff including advanced publication of materials where possible and understanding how different students need to do different things to best engage, building upon the findings of the previous year's report. Students continue to believe that progress can and should be made in implementing more accessible teaching practices.

Update: The University held a learning and teaching mini-conference focussing on neurodiversity. While we were pleased to see this as a key focus, attendance is still optional and there have been no changes

to requirements around teaching and assessment methods, advanced publication of materials or recording teaching content. It should be noted that where departments do share advanced teaching materials or lecture notes that students report that this happens less in the medium of Welsh.

Recommendation 2: Timetabling has historically been a challenge and remains so. Undeb Aberystwyth requests that Aberystwyth University consider the issues outlined above, particularly regarding students experiencing lengthy days with limited or no breaks, to help improve the mental well-being of our student community and to maximise their chances of success.

Update: We do not believe there has been any change or improvement with regards to timetabling and this remains a challenge.

Support and Guidance

Recommendation 1: Measures are in place to ensure that course costs are accurately represented, including often-overlooked aspects such as equipment costs and additional transportation expenses.

Update: The University has responded positively to additional course costs that have been collated and presented by the Students' Union. The Undeb is pleased with the commitment the University has officially expressed to post up to date additional Costs online for the new academic year.

Recommendation 2: Encourage the implementation of the "fit to sit" policy as soon as possible, while continuing to support and uphold the current measures in place in the meantime.

Update: Disappointingly the University postponed implementation of the "Fit to Sit" policy. While it was initially planned for either the 2024/25 or 2025/26 academic years, the University felt that further clarification was needed on policy wording, resulting in a delay. The students' Union will continue to push for this policy to be implemented as soon as possible as it will be of huge benefit to students.

Recommendation 3: Consider rephrasing the language on the Hardship Fund page and clarifying what the calculation is for essential living costs includes.

Update: The University has updated the "typical cost of living" to be more in line with the reality experienced by Aberystwyth students and have committed to reviewing annually which is great. The wording has been updated on the Hardship Fund application pages for example instead of stating "We will assume that students have made adequate provision to come to University" the information now states aht the fund can help with "Hardship arising from genuine, unforeseen or unexpected

circumstances for which you have not been able to plan" and "Financial difficulties resulting from a genuine shortfall of your income and essential expenditure. Which is much more accessible. While the page no longer states that students need to be in their overdraft to be eligible for hardship funds, however once you open the form to apply it does still state that students are expected to use an overdraft which we feel is unfair and prohibitive.

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and promote the 15 day turnaround time and consider how to support students facing significant and impactful delays to come forward and report. measures in place to address the small amount of highly impactful delayed feedback.

Update: Student insight collected at the end of last academic year showed that only 10% of respondents said they rarely or never received their work back within the 15-day marking turnaround. Additionally, 91% of students were satisfied that they received their feedback on time. Students have not been raising this as a challenge this year which is great.

Recommendation 2: To review the UAP procedure in consideration of AI to prioritise fairness, consistency between departments and to strive to resolve UAP cases more quickly, especially ahead of examination periods.

Update: The University has updated its UAP approach to AI-generated work, shifting from an "all-or-nothing" allegation to a percentage-based system similar to plagiarism, with a sliding scale of penalty points. As the University does not use AI-detection software, concerns are raised by markers and followed by an authenticity interview. These interviews can be stressful and often take place quite some time after submission, when students are already focused on new assessments.

If the members of the interview panel are not satisfied with a student's response this leads to a UAP panel. 9% of SU Advice cases this year have been AI focussed cases and it seems that often International Students can be disproportionately affected as they do not necessarily know the rules in the UK. It still feels that more could be done to educate students in the first semester about ethical, responsible AI usage and where it is and is not acceptable. The introduction of a tool use statement seems to have helped in some departments but this is not consistently applied across all areas of study. The SU is aware work is being done to try and ensure that the procedure is applied more fairly following the transformation programme so hopefully things will be clearer next year.

Facilities and Resources

Recommendation 1: Continue developing and expanding the capacity for students to reserve accommodation aligned with their lifestyle preferences. We believe the positive impact this will have on student well-being is significant.

Update: The University has added the ability to select specific rooms on the accommodation platform, along with more detailed room information. Students can now also choose single-sex and quiet-area options. However, the system still does not support lifestyle-based preferences such as alcohol-free living, religious considerations, or LGBTQIA+-friendly options.

Students have also reported that rooms sometimes appear available on the system but are no longer available when they try to select them. In addition, there are ongoing concerns that Pantycelyn continues to allocate rooms to students who do not speak Welsh and have no intention of learning, which undermines the purpose of the hall.

Recommendation 2: Where possible, invest in small improvements that enhance the student experience; these do not need to involve major building renovations or the installation of costly equipment. Sometimes, simply adding an extra power outlet, desk lamp, or seating bench can make a significant difference with minimal financial impact.

Update: Additional sockets are available in the SU bar but it is not clear if any have been added elsewhere to social or teaching spaces on campus. While this is progress, we feel that more could be done to enhance satisfaction on Campus without too much of a cost outlay.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that key spaces are accessible for wheelchair users, widening doors where needed.

Update: The Students' Union met with the University and AccessAble towards the end of the year to discuss improving campus information and navigation for students with physical disabilities (AccessAble is the UK's largest provider of accessibility information, supporting more than 350 organisations with detailed data and practical insight). However, despite these discussions, there does not appear to have been any progress on this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Ensure that University accommodation is fit for purpose and mould free. Consider where outdoor furniture could be placed around Cwrt Mawr and other halls.

Update: A small number of benches have been added to locations outside some student accommodation but there are still issues with drainage and mould in some accommodation blocks such as Cwrt Mawr.

Employability and Development

Recommendation 1: Explore if the Undeb Aberystwyth platform could be adapted (our preferable option as committee members interact with the platform regularly) or that something be developed in partnership with the Careers Service to support students to record skills and development to further promote their employability.

Update: We have worked closely with the University's Careers & Employability Service to develop our Volunteering platform to enable skills developed and demonstrated through paid employment to be recorded on the system in addition to volunteering hours. Within the platform students can work towards a Skills Award by logging a minimum of 60 hours of work and/or volunteering, track the skills developed, attend development sessions and reflect on their growth.

Recommendation 2: Continue with the Career Readiness and Professional Pathways schemes, reviewing the impact of the 2 week block vs increased opportunities to participate throughout the year.

Update: The University continued with the Career Readiness and Professional Pathways schemes broadening all participating students in the Professional Pathways scheme to have a longer block of placement with an intense block at the end as piloted in the Students' Union which is great to see.

Student Voice

This section looks at the partnership between the University and Undeb Aberystwyth in delivering an effective Student Voice systems including Academic Representation System.

Undeb Aber acknowledges the significant commitment and support provided by University Staff in ensuring that the Student Voice is heard at Aberystwyth. This dedication is undoubtedly a key factor in the sustained high levels of satisfaction regarding the student experience. However, academic representation remains essential in upholding standards through collaborative, representative, and accessible feedback mechanisms. Students have played a vital role in effectively monitoring modules this year, particularly in areas where departmental oversight is limited, such as identifying issues with late marking and delays in the release of learning and assessment materials.

Academic Representation

Over the last year, we have worked with the University to introduce a new Academic Rep recruitment model following policy agreed at the May 2025 Education and Student Experience Committee. Previously, Reps were elected through the Students' Union website, a process that consistently struggled to attract engagement. Under the new system, departments appoint their own Reps, provided all students are given an equal opportunity to put their name forward. Where interest exceeded the number of available roles, departments either accepted all volunteers or held their own internal elections.

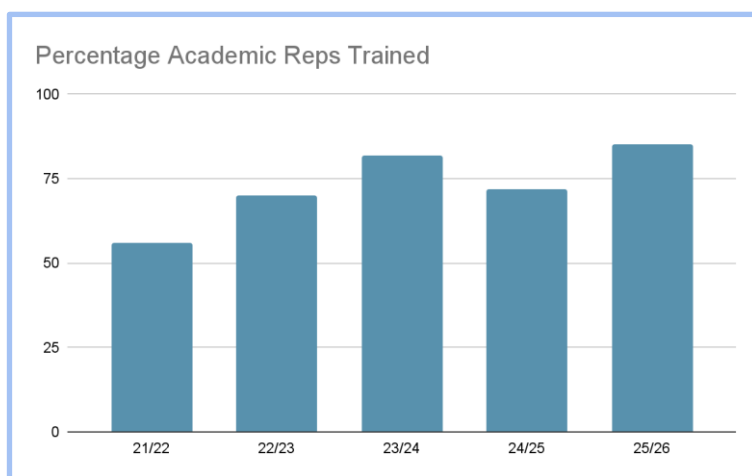
By the end of the second teaching week, departments submitted their confirmed Rep lists to the Students' Union for training and induction. In total, 295 Reps roles were filled for the 2025-26 academic year which is on a par with previous years numbers. A Welsh Culture Officer and UMCA President initiative, also saw an increase in the number of departmental Welsh Reps, which operate on a departmental level to promote Welsh Language provision in

This new collaborative streamlined approach enabled us to begin training one week earlier than in previous years, with induction starting in week 4. As a result, Reps had more time to speak with students on their programme before the first SSCC of the year.

We really appreciate the continued support of Departments in working to fill vacant positions and encourage students to become Academic Reps.

Overall, 85% of Academic Representatives received induction training at the earliest opportunity, with 77.5% having completed induction by the end of Week 8. This is the highest percentage of Reps trained in the last 5 years, beating the previous highest 82% trained in 23/24.

Training sessions were offered in both English and Welsh; the English sessions were delivered by the Academic Affairs Officer and the Academic Representation Coordinator, while the Welsh sessions were presented by our Welsh Culture Officer & UMCA President and Cathryn Charnell-White from the Welsh and Celtic Studies department. To support Representatives further, an updated Rep Handbook was provided to assist with any questions throughout their tenure.



Following our initial training, the Annual Academic Rep Conference took place in November and received strong participation from Reps. The event featured sessions on employability, leadership, support services, and volunteering opportunities. We also held a variety of one-off sessions for Reps, such as:

- Meet & Greet
- Leadership skills training with Careers
- Visit to the National Library
- Networking session with Reps and University Staff

Following a similar trend to previous years, around half of students remain unaware of who their Academic Rep is and what their responsibilities are. In our recent Term 2 survey only 57% of respondents knew who their Academic Rep was, with only 33% of those students saying they contacted their Rep about an issue in the year.

The 2025–26 Student Experience Survey (University SES) will provide more up-to-date insight into the likely 2026 NSS outcome for Student Voice questions. In the 2025 NSS, only 73% of students agreed that it is clear how feedback on their course is acted upon, and 73% agreed that the Students' Union represents their academic interests. There is room for improvement here and both the Students' Union and the University are committed to improving satisfaction in these areas. Positively, 31% of students surveyed in our term 2 survey neither agreed nor disagreed that the SU is a positive influence for

students, with only 6% disagreeing which demonstrates a large middle ground that could move to a positive place rather than high levels of dissatisfaction.

To strengthen our understanding of Academic Rep activity, the Students' Union recommends closer links between SSCC Chairs and the Undeb Academic Rep Coordinator. Chairs proactively sharing minutes, including attendance records and any general feedback on Rep engagement, would significantly enhance our ability to identify issues early and support Reps more effectively.

Our 2025 Annual Submission recommended that Academic Reps should have opportunities to connect with their cohort and introduce themselves physically at the start of key in person classes. This remains essential for students to identify their representatives, offer feedback, and know who to approach for support and communication. While some progress has been made on this recommendation, we continue to prioritise it for the coming academic year.

"I have literally no clue who they are. I received no email informing me who they are, nor have they made it known in any of my classes", "Not sure what academic reps do" (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026).

Students are able to find out who their Academic Rep is on Blackboard but we have also been working this year to encourage departments to display a photo and some brief info about individual Academic Reps physically within key spaces. We have had limited uptake from Departments but we believe this basic visibility remains a key factor in helping students recognise and engage with their representatives.

These actions collectively aim to strengthen the student voice infrastructure, improve transparency around how feedback is acted upon, and enhance confidence in the SU's ability to represent academic interests.

Academic Community Development

Over the last year, Undeb Aberystwyth has taken part in an exclusive Wales Medr/NUS Charity Academic Communities experiment to explore how we can develop Academic Societies and Academic Representation to intersect more intentionally to strengthen belonging and overall satisfaction and unlock new models of student engagement and student voice that are relevant, inclusive and impactful. The Students' Union developed a dedicated student staff member role to liaise with Theatre, Film and Television Studies department colleagues (particularly Kate Woodward and Louise Ritchie) to develop a new academic society with different structures that intersect with and promote academic representation that co-create activities and opportunities for students.

As part of the project, representation has been supported through both a feedback box and Unitu. A physical feedback box was placed in the TFTS department, inviting students to submit comments about

their academic experience. Since December, the SU has collected more than 50 notes, some anonymous, others named, ranging from positive reflections to constructive criticism.

Reps and society members then meet with staff to review feedback collectively and agree practical solutions. This collaborative approach has strengthened representation, improved responsiveness, and created a shared space where students, Academic Reps and staff work together to enhance the academic experience.

The project has also allowed for cocreation and co-promotion of departmental activity. For example, The TFTS careers session on 5 February 2026 saw attendance double to more than 40 students after a coordinated, student-led communication push. Working with Screen Alliance Wales, the department, Student Reps, the Academic Society, Peer Guides and the SU's Community and Representation Assistant used targeted emails, social media, and peer networks to reach students who often miss official messages. The strong turnout delivered valuable industry insights, strengthened links with Screen Alliance Wales, and showed a scalable model for high-impact careers events.

Tell Us Now, Your Voice Matters and Unitu

Previous SU annual reports have featured recommended changes to the University "Tell us Now/Your Voice Matters" (TUN/YVM) feedback process for many years now. The University has stopped using TUN/YVM this year and the University has been actively working with the Students' Union to consider alternative options. We would like to use this moment of change to strengthen how the Students' Union and the University work in partnership, positioning the SU as a primary voice for students. By ensuring that academic representation, SU activity, and individual feedback mechanisms interact more effectively, we can surface collective issues clearly and avoid conflating isolated, customer-style comments with wider patterns affecting the student body. This approach will support more accurate insight, stronger student voice, and meaningful improvements in academic experience and overall university satisfaction.

As mentioned above, the Students' Union has been working with Unitu, an online platform designed to facilitate "real-time, transparent feedback and collaboration between students and staff. It aims to bridge the student-staff divide by enabling instantaneous, actionable communication to improve the overall student experience." Although implementation took longer than expected due to single sign-on issues, early signs are positive, and the Students' Union is keen to build on this progress in the next academic year.

Student Experience Survey (SES):

The timing of the SES continues to present challenges for students, primarily due to the lack of assessment feedback available at the time they participate in the survey. We also know that many qualitative responses tend to be unconstructive or lack substantive detail. This can hinder efforts to address issues effectively, as insufficient information is provided to inform meaningful improvements. The SES is primarily a module evaluation and academic satisfaction, not a measure of broader student experience, and its current name creates confusion about its purpose. We believe both the timing and naming of the SES should be reviewed to ensure clearer expectations and better-quality data.

We would also welcome Departments working more closely with Academic Reps to interpret SES data, working with them to understand what comments mean, then mutually agreeing on an action to take to help address the issue as we have in the TFTS academic community.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Academic Reps should have consistent opportunities to connect with their cohort and introduce themselves physically at the start of key in person classes. Departments should work with the SU to ensure photos and brief information about individual Academic Reps is physically displayed within key spaces.

Recommendation 2: Greater consistency in how SSCC Chairs share minutes, including attendance, with the Students' Union would help us identify patterns and understand where additional support for Reps may be needed. Any general feedback on how we can help Reps engage more effectively would also enable us to make targeted improvements.

We also encourage Departments to collaborate with Academic Reps when interpreting student feedback, SES comments and scoring, rather than positioning Reps solely as messengers passing information on. Collaborative review leads to clearer understanding of issues and more meaningful action.

Recommendation 3: Undeb to continue with the TFTS Academic Community and expand to include another department to consider how it could be the future of academic representation.

Recommendation 4: The University should continue to work in partnership with the SU to develop effective student led voice mechanisms, supporting the SU to be a primary voice for students where appropriate and continuing to avoid duplication of roles or activity. As part of this the SU could expand the Unitu pilot and continue its commitment to share student insight in 2026-27 including re-running

the induction survey (to be developed in close partnership with the University), our Advisory Boards and the term 1 and term 2 surveys.

Learning and Teaching

This section looks at how the university teaches students their degree, covering things like subject content, learning styles and staff development.

Accessible Teaching

Students with additional needs continue to raise concerns about the lack of advance publication of learning materials before teaching and assessments. They have also highlighted issues with accessible teaching. Key considerations include:

- **Lecture materials:** Students with additional needs have raised that they would be able to better learn and access teaching content if lecture materials could be provided in advance, ideally one to two weeks before the lecture. While we understand there may be some challenges with advanced information it might be more possible to provide the lecture materials during or immediately following lecture. This happens in some cases but students have reported that there are current inconsistencies regarding some bilingual modules where less Welsh content is available than English or where Welsh materials are uploaded later than the English as a result of having a different module coordinator.
- **Assessment briefs:** Students, regardless of accessibility needs, have reported that assessment briefs are frequently not available early enough and could sometimes be clearer. It would impact student satisfaction and support success if assessment briefs were released at the start of the semester to allow more preparation time, with all details needed.

"I feel like coursework briefs could stand to be more detailed. There have been several times where lecturers have commented that I didn't add something I didn't even know I needed to. For reference, the absolute BEST coursework brief I have seen was for the lab report in BR22220 Immunology, which was detailed and extremely helpful. I think it would be better if all coursework briefs for written work were as detailed as that one" (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026)

- **Accessible lectures:** Students suggest that academic staff should receive training in Neurodiversity to leverage strengths and mitigate challenges experienced by disabled students. At our Disabled Students Advisory Board students recommended
 - Using microphones in larger lecture spaces.
 - Providing dyslexia-friendly slides.
 - Sharing seminar materials and questions in advance.
 - Allowing flexibility in movement including fidgeting, moving around and seating.
 - Implementing variable lighting.
 - Employing diverse teaching methods.

We recognise and really appreciate the University running a mini-conference on neurodiversity, which helped bring inclusive teaching practices to the forefront for staff who are already engaged in this area. However, attendance remains optional, meaning the impact is limited to those who are already interested and proactive. There have also been no changes to the core requirements around teaching or assessment methods, so the wider shift towards inclusive practice has not yet materialised.

- **Seminars:** Some disabled students have reported regularly being unable to attend seminars in person due to the impact of their conditions and the difficulty of travelling to campus. These students are likely to have support in place through the University's accessibility team, including a learning and teaching plan, but this does not currently guarantee an alternative way to access seminars.

We would welcome the University working with the accessibility team to offer a remote attendance option as a reasonable adjustment where appropriate. This would support students to engage and succeed without requiring seminars to be recorded, which we know most staff and students prefer to avoid.

This recommendation comes from the Disabled Students' Advisory Board, where students with chronic illnesses reported being unable to access their seminars at all. Given that seminars are a core mode of teaching, the absence of an alternative format prevents these students from fully participating in their studies.

We know that many neurodivergent students feel unable to raise issues about their environment in the moment, particularly during live teaching. Speaking up in front of others, interrupting the flow of a session, or drawing attention to themselves can be especially difficult. To address this, the University could encourage lecturers and Academic Reps to provide an anonymous feedback link during lectures, or ways to allow students to flag issues such as audio, noise, tics, or lighting without having to speak out.

"[The Academic Rep] often passes out post it notes before lectures for anonymous feedback to be submitted which I like" (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026)

Working with the Students' Union, using Unitu could also support this process after the session has ended, giving students a way to report barriers once they have had time to reflect.

Timetabling and attendance

Some Academic Reps have observed that students tend to engage with materials and seminars only if they are directly relevant to their assessments. For instance, in essay-based modules, students often feel there is little need to prepare by reading materials or watching lectures ahead of seminars that are not necessary for their assignments. Instead, they prefer to allocate that time to other activities, such as working on the assignment itself, paid employment, or taking breaks from their studies.

When asked about the common reasons for low attendance and engagement, students highlighted:

- **Timetabling pressures:** Some students continue to experience tightly packed schedules, with lectures arranged back-to-back or, in rare cases, clashing. Students described this as “exhausting” and “off-putting”. Reducing these patterns would make attendance more manageable.
- **Clustered assessment deadlines:** Students reported being more likely to skip classes when multiple deadlines fall close together, as they redirect their time and energy towards completing assessments.
- **Direct relevance to assessment:** Students reported as significantly more likely to attend sessions that clearly support their assessed work. Minimising in-person sessions that have no direct connection to assessment, or more clearly highlighting how those sessions contribute to assessed learning, would have a positive impact on attendance. Strengthening the assessment-learning link helps students understand the value of engaging with the full teaching offer.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: We continue to emphasise the importance of accessible teaching, building on last year’s findings. Students report that practices such as publishing materials in advance, recognising different engagement needs, and creating environments where they feel free to move, tic, or be themselves make a meaningful difference to their learning. While many staff already model strong inclusive practice, students believe further progress is both possible and necessary. Embedding these approaches more consistently would strengthen accessible teaching across the University.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that Welsh-language materials are uploaded and available consistently alongside the English versions, with clear communication for current and future students about where to find them. Strengthening Welsh-language parity will support accessibility, clarity, and confidence for Cymraeg-medium learners.

Recommendation 3: Where a student has a disclosed disability, academics should work with the University's accessibility team to explore whether hybrid or remote attendance could be offered as a reasonable adjustment when a condition affects their ability to travel to campus. This should be considered as part of developing a disabled student's learning and teaching plan.

Recommendation 4: Timetabling continues to present challenges, particularly around clustered lectures, long days with limited or no breaks, weak connections between sessions and assessment, and the impact of multiple assignment deadlines falling close together during teaching time. Assessment briefs should be available as early as possible (with all details necessary) to support attendance.

Recommendation 5: In the absence of TUN, the University should work with the Students' Union to introduce live anonymous feedback options for lecturers during class time, enabling students to flag barriers without speaking out. The University could also proactively collaborate with the SU and Unitu to support disabled students to report accessibility issues outside of class time.

Recommendation 6: The University should update its Welsh-medium module descriptions to clearly state which elements: seminars, lectures, and assessments, are delivered in Welsh. Current descriptions are unclear. With new Coleg Cymraeg guidelines now available, adopting them would ensure students receive an accurate picture of the Welsh-medium offer.

Assessment and Feedback

This section looks at how the university assesses you throughout your degree, covering areas such as coursework, exams, and feedback.

Academic Procedures

As discussed in the recent Quality and Standards committee meeting, both "Special Circumstances" and "Fit to Sit" policies are still under consideration. A new Special Circumstances procedure was added this year, the system is now centralised to encourage consistency and students can apply through their student record. Outcomes are now shared with students which is an improvement and departments may request more information/evidence. While the process is helpful where departments are supportive, students are asked to provide an impact statement as part of the process, and we are aware that a number of applications are rejected because they have not provided enough detail and further evidence or clarity has not been sought by a department. This suggests a need to review how impact statements are interpreted and how students are supported to complete them.

Undeb Aberystwyth's guidance on "Special Circumstances and Extensions" is the second highest viewed guide on our web pages (and was the most viewed guide in the academic year 24/25) with 11% of all views (776 views).

Unacceptable Academic Practice (UAP) remained the highest enquiry topic this year. With the rollout of the University's AI guidance, we had hoped to see a reduction in UAP cases, particularly those linked to AI use. Instead, cases have increased, and this is before the final exam period. In our Term 2 survey, only 30% of students reported using AI in their academic work this year, and 80% said they felt it was clear how AI should or should not be used in assessments. While it is positive that most students *believe* the rules are clear, our experience suggests that many students think they understand the expectations but in reality there may be gaps in their knowledge that they may only realise when they are already facing a UAP case not least because student guidance varies significantly between modules. A number of students also raised concerns about contradictions between what is considered acceptable AI use for students and what academic staff are permitted to do. We would welcome clear, institution-wide guidelines that apply equally to students and staff to ensure shared expectations and opportunities.

Additionally, there is growing concern among students about the lengthy process involved in addressing UAPs. For example, students flagged for UAPs in the first semester were notified around early December but did not receive further communication from the University until January. This delay caused significant anxiety and disruption during the January exams. The prolonged process also makes it more challenging for students to defend against authenticity/AI allegations, as they are more likely to

have forgotten the content they generated, which negatively impacts their ability to prove the work is their own. As outlined above we are disappointed that the implementation of the "Fit to Sit" policy has been postponed this year. While it was initially planned for either the 2024/25 or 2025/26 academic years, further clarification on the policy's wording is needed, resulting in a delay. Hopefully, this policy will be implemented as soon as it is feasible as it will be of huge benefit to students. We continue to advocate for the University to advance the "Fit to Sit" policy, especially considering our high number of disabled and neurodivergent students which continues to increase. Implementing the "Fit to Sit" policy would benefit current and future AU students and enhance the University's reputation as an accessible institution.

Reassessment/Re-sit caps

As with discussions on reassessment fees, we welcome the work that has been done towards the removal of reassessment caps. There are a whole host of legitimate struggles that can result in students struggling academically. While some academics are concerned with students intentionally not submitting or failing first submissions, we believe that this is incredibly unlikely and does not consider the reality of bunched deadlines and life struggles and juggles that could impact performance. Removing re-sit caps from even just one more assessment opportunity will have a hugely positive impact on student success, progression, anxiety, and wellbeing. As it is students feel discouraged by capped reassessment, with some reporting that they have considered dropping out because of it.

We understand the delay on removing resit caps has been mainly due to the extensive work that the Registry had to undertake, with a new Registrar in place we hope that this work can be done and approved as soon as possible, and that the changes are applied to all students equally, regardless of the year in which they initiated their course.

Academic Feedback

In the 2025 NSS 80% of students felt their feedback often helped them to improve their work (78% in 2024) which was higher than the sector wide average of 75%. However, this year the PVC (ESE)'s asked the Students' Union about how much students read and absorb feedback given lower numbers appearing to access it online. In our Term 2 survey seventy-five percent of respondents said they always read their feedback, with a further 20% saying they often read it. Only 5% reported rarely or never reading their feedback.

Students who did not regularly read their feedback gave a range of reasons, including:

- Feeling anxious or intimidated

- Feeling specifically intimidated by voice-recorded feedback
- Believing that if their mark is good, they do not need to read the comments
- Feeling they already know what the feedback will say
- Not finding the feedback given valuable or useful
- Forgetting to look at it
- Feeling that feedback on final assessments is irrelevant
- Having had a poor experience or feeling unsupported throughout the module

"Honestly, my anxiety spikes and I've been happy with my results so far. I saw some friends get really blunt and rude feedback in first year and it made me very nervous about my own. I really want to engage more with my feedback, but just can't bring myself to do it because I struggle so much with tone over text. This is a personal issue, but I'm not really sure what to do about it." (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026).

These insights suggest that while most students do engage with feedback, there are clear emotional, structural and pedagogic barriers that prevent a minority from doing so.

Assignment clustering: Reps continue to report that students experience bunching of assessment deadlines and that they would prefer more separation between deadlines (ideally two weeks apart). They noted that many students skip classes to focus on assessments when deadlines are close together. The SU is also aware that deadlines and submission times in the day vary by department and it may be beneficial to consider aligned standardised deadlines that consider availability of academic staff and discourage unhealthy 'all nighter' approaches and this could be explored in 2026-27.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Consider whether any further insight is needed on how to improve feedback so that more students feel confident to read it. Perhaps working with student accessibility service and considering it with teaching and learning plans for disabled students and/or offering the choice of written or recorded feedback or the opportunity to discuss face to face. Review whether feedback engagement differs for final assessments. If significantly fewer students read feedback on final assignments, the University may wish to explore whether students could opt for reduced or lighter-touch feedback at this stage, which could help manage marking load while still meeting student needs.

Recommendation 2: To review the UAP procedure in consideration of AI to prioritise fairness, consistency between departments (including the use of AI tool use statements as this is inconsistent) and to strive to resolve UAP cases more quickly, especially ahead of examination periods. In addition to

consistent rules between departments, we would also like to see parity between acceptable AI use for students and staff.

Recommendation 3: Remove re-sit fees and caps and ensure that any removal of caps applies regardless of the year a student started their course. Communication about the removal should be clear and consistent.

Recommendation 4: Implement the "fit to sit" policy as soon as possible and provide a clear sense of when it will be considered again and the work being undertaken to clarify the policy. In the meantime, students would benefit from clearer guidance on special circumstances impact statements, with examples and accessible explanations that help them to create impact statements more effectively. This should be paired with greater consistency in how departments interpret and assess impact statements to ensure fair and equitable decision-making across the University. It should also be noted that removing reassessment fees and caps will significantly mitigate the impact of Special Circumstances on students, as they will no longer be financially or academically penalised for poorer performance arising from legitimate difficulties.

Recommendation 5: Reduce assessment bunching by ensuring deadlines are spaced more evenly across modules and provide assessment briefs at the start of teaching blocks well help students to plan their workload more effectively and may improve attendance at lectures.

It may also be beneficial to explore aligning deadlines across departments. Standardised submission times could discourage unhealthy working patterns, reduce the pressure that leads to "all-nighter" behaviour, and ensure students can resolve queries while academic staff are more likely to be available.

Support and Guidance

This section looks at how the university supports you throughout your degree, looking at things like personal tutoring, academic support, and study guidance.

When asked whether they felt the University cared about their wellbeing only 49% of students agreed with 38% neither agreeing nor disagreeing (only 14% disagreed). 58% and 59% reported as feeling healthy and happy. In our term 1 and term 2 surveys students were asked about their struggles. The top issues remain consistent with previous years with Stress and anxiety being a significant struggle (67% in term 1 and 76% in term 2) being 15% ahead of the next most frequent struggle which was keeping up with the workload (51% in term 1 and 45% in term 2).

Cost of Living:

The cost of living continues to be one of the most critical challenges facing students, and as such was voted to be a Union wide priority for this academic year.

The University provides information on "typical costs of living in Aber" on its website and we can see that work has been done to make these more realistic than previously listed. The Students' Union is eager to see that the University continues to review this information annually to ensure that this information is up-to-date and accurate. Currently, the published monthly expenses (excluding rent) amount to £640.50 (£1,280 including rent) for on-campus living and £890.50 (£1,332.50 including rent) for private accommodation. While figures have been updated, we remain concerned that Hardship funds awarded are still below those that a University Hardship fund report recommended to the Student Experience Committee in 2022. A 4 week award is now £320 (£280 in 2024-25 and £260 in 2023-24) while the 2022 recommended figure was £380 and the cost of living has increased since then.

The Students' Union does understand that the Hardship fund is limited and that the University is trying to balance student need against ensuring that a maximum student numbers benefit from the fund but the language used around the Hardship fund also remains potentially prohibitive with the webpage stating "We will assume that students have made adequate provision to come to University" and "We will use a figure for calculating essential outgoings". The Students' Union believes that this assumption of provision is likely to deter many students in need from applying and we would like to see the "figure for calculating" outgoings explained as this would be more transparent to students facing difficulty.

In our Term 2 survey, 49% of students reported experiencing financial challenges, with 15% describing these as significant. The impacts were wide-ranging students told us they were seeing friends or exercising less, needing to seek paid employment, struggling to afford food, bills or rent, and

experiencing increased anxiety, poorer mental health, and reduced ability to focus on their studies. These findings highlight the scale of financial pressure affecting the student community.

"My maintenance loan is barely enough to cover rent for my accommodation and so I struggle to find enough money elsewhere to pay for food. The hardship fund has rejected my application because I keep my maintenance loan in my savings so that I can pay for rent, even if that means I can't afford food without compromising my housing situation" (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026).

While 33% of students reported being in paid employment, this does not reflect the number who *need* to work, only those who were able to secure part-time roles in or around Aberystwyth. With limited local opportunities, the true level of financial strain is likely higher than the data suggests.

Among those in paid work, 36% reported working more than 16 hours per week, including 10% who worked over 30 hours. When asked why they worked, only 20% said it was for general experience or career-related reasons; the majority (49%) reported working to pay bills or rent.

While cost-of-living pressures are already creating significant challenges for students, needing to work to get by adds further strain. Only 19% of students in paid work described their job as *not* tiring, with a quarter saying it made them *very* tired. This level of fatigue has clear implications for wellbeing, study time, and academic focus

"I work 17 hours a week earning roughly £750 a month (give or take). Having to work alongside uni means that I don't have the same experience as my peers. I have to manage my time to the extreme.[...] Having to organise my own finances and provide for myself whilst having to put in the necessary energy required to achieve for my degree is exhausting".(student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026).

Hidden, additional costs and resit fees

Hidden or additional course costs represent another significant aspect of the cost of living that is increasingly relevant as expenses continue to rise. Students, particularly those pursuing degrees in the Arts, often encounter unexpected expenses that can accumulate rapidly. These costs may include items such as photography paper, materials for projects, equipment for their work, and various other necessary resources. This matter is of urgency for the University given the recent changes to the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act (DMCC Act) in Autumn 2025.

"A university might outline tuition fees clearly but neglect to inform students about additional costs, like charges for field trips or specialist equipment. This could now be deemed a serious breach because these costs represent material information – and while in the past a university might have argued that failing to mention a minor fee did not affect a student's decision to enrol, that defence is no longer viable." (<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/honesty-and-accuracy-is-about-to-get-even-more-important/>)"

As highlighted by Jim Dickinson at WonkHE, the amendments to the DMCC Act may prompt numerous discussions between AU and UA regarding the transparency of their costs. As previously mentioned, the ongoing cost of living crisis means that these hidden expenses may have more significant consequences than in the past.

We have been working with the students to collate these costs and appreciate a recent University commitment to publish online all the up-to-date additional costs associated with Aberystwyth Programmes which will make it easier for students to plan for future costs and make informed choices.

Transport

Access to transport has been flagged as a cost of living and accessibility issue for students as part of our Advisory Groups and follow up conversations. A student-led campaign has highlighted a lack of buses that travel to campus and highlighted that none travel to accommodation at Fferm Penglais. This means that students are having to spend money they do not have on taxis if they have mobility challenges or disabilities or if they need to get from town to Campus in a tighter timeframe or to avoid poor weather. The Students' Union has met with Shelley Childs, Ceredigion Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services, and Mel Evans, managing Director of Mid-Wales Travel, to discuss improving bus provision for students. As a result of the initial meeting, Mid-Wales travel has agreed to investigate the viability of adding Fferm Penglais as a stop for the 301 bus for the 2026-27 academic year. While this will mean improvements for next year (if implemented) the University does need to consider how a lack of available transport could impact the Aberystwyth University experience

Reassessment/re-sit fees

We welcome the positive discussions around removing re-sit fees for students who need to re-sit examinations or assessments where there is a current charge. Given the significant financial commitments students already make in tuition, rent, bills and living costs, applying resit fees effectively penalises those who may have struggled academically for a wide range of reasons (including the impact of already considerable cost of living and financial pressures/anxieties). There are already additional costs for some students if they need to travel back to Aberystwyth for reassessments, often without access to summer accommodation in the summer reassessment period. We strongly support the full removal of reassessment/resit fees for all students from the 2026-27 academic year. This would reduce unnecessary financial pressure and align with a more supportive approach to student academic progression.

Online support information

Increasing students' awareness of the support available during their time at university is a strategic priority, particularly considering recent NSS scores on awareness of these services. The changes following the restructure have not yet been reflected on the University's webpages, which is understandable given the timing, but this will affect clarity for incoming students unless updated ahead of the new academic year. The Help's Right Here pages would benefit from setting out more clearly which peer support options exist across the University (including Undeb's departmental Academic Representatives), distinguishing more clearly between Signpost Mentors and departmental Peer Guides to reduce confusion during an already information-heavy first week. The SU could collaborate with the relevant teams to ensure that Wellbeing Resources are explained in simpler, more student-friendly language so that both new and current students can more easily understand and access the support available to them.

Academic Registry Central Hubs

This year, the academic hubs under Academic Registry were centralised. Students in our Disabled Students Advisory Group reported several impacts from this change that could be quite easily mitigated. Wheelchair users noted that travelling between the different hubs is not always straightforward or accessible. Students also told us that the new locations feel less familiar and, at times, less approachable than the previous departmental model.

To improve accessibility and confidence, students suggested that central spaces could be reviewed for physical accessibility and students with sensory considerations. IF the University were to provide photos or short videos online showing how to find each hub, what each hub looks like and photos of staff working there this would particularly support neurodivergent students with unfamiliar territory. These changes would help ensure the centralised model remains genuinely accessible and welcoming for all students, especially those with additional needs.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Ensure that measures are in place to review and publicise hidden or additional course costs, including often-overlooked aspects such as equipment costs and additional transportation expenses.

Recommendation 2: Continue to work with Undeb Aberystwyth to tackle the Cost of Living on Campus where possible. This includes keeping an affordable meal option and increasing the ability for students to heat and eat their own food on Campus, considering the impact of transport to campus,

and recognising the impact anxieties and paid work are having on student wellbeing, mental health, and academic performance.

Recommendation 3: Remove reassessment/resit fees as soon as possible for all students.

Recommendation 4 Continue to review and update the published “typical costs of living in Aber” each year to ensure they remain accurate and realistic, enabling students to make informed decisions and understand the costs they will be expected to meet while studying and living in Aberystwyth.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that all student-facing support information is updated over the summer to reflect post-restructure changes, so that incoming students in the new academic year have clear, accurate and accessible guidance on where to find help. Increasing students’ awareness of available support remains a strategic priority, and timely updates will significantly improve clarity and confidence in navigating student support services.

Facilities and Resources

This section looks at the facilities the university provides you with throughout the student's degree, covering things like libraries, ICT, and learning spaces.

Investing in spaces and accessibility

A number of improvements were made to the Hugh Owen Library last year and there were some changes to access hours with the upper floor closing in the evening. While a minority of students expressed unhappiness with the changes, they appear to have been accepted well this year. The library reports a small but steady number of requests for a return to full 24/7 opening, with some students asking for the upper floors to be included and others simply wanting more 24/7 study space. Students are reminded that the whole library is open 24/7 during the January and April/May exam periods, and staff follow up with students to understand what they specifically need from extended opening.

During the most recent 24/7 period, the library was able to keep the building off Salto lock, and although spaces were busy, this did not cause issues. Students requesting microwaves are being directed to the SU Community Kitchen. Estates are also exploring options to extend workstation provision in town, particularly if Old College study space is not available as soon as originally planned.

While the Students' Union continues to appreciate the University financial situation, we would like to highlight some facilities improvements that we believe would be low cost or make use of ring-fenced funding that students believe would enhance the student experience on Campus.:

- **More plug sockets in teaching spaces:** This featured in our annual report last year and remains something that students would find helpful on campus.
- **Improving accessibility of spaces:** Students have highlighted that some accessible toilets and community spaces do not meet standard door-width requirements for wheelchair users. It is unclear whether the University still holds any dedicated accessibility improvement funds, but last year there was confusion about their purpose. For example, the Students' Union requested funding to widen the doors to the most frequently used SU meeting rooms, which are currently too narrow, but were advised that the fund could not be used for capital works. This was surprising, as the SU's front doors had previously been redeveloped using the same fund. Greater clarity on whether accessibility funds still exist and how they can be used would be beneficial.
- Our Disabled Students Advisory Board raised several accessibility issues and development opportunities this year:

- **Campus access notifications:** Students with physical access needs would benefit from being notified when lifts or key access routes are out of order. If notifications are not possible, a clearly signposted online space where students can check live access issues would be valuable.
- **Consistent accessibility signage:** Signage for accessible routes and entry points varies across campus and could be standardised.
- **Lighting improvements:** Some areas of campus have inadequate lighting, which affects safety and accessibility, particularly for visually impaired students.
- **Accessibility-minded walk-rounds:** Regular checks could help identify uneven pathways, fading step-edge paint, unstable railings, and other hazards. For example, the steps outside Interpol are difficult for partially sighted students to see.
- **Accessible campus tours:** Offering tours designed with accessibility in mind would support new students with mobility or sensory needs.
- **Improved AccessAble information:** Students would welcome wider and more detailed information on AccessAble. The SU has facilitated a focus group to support this work in future years.
- **Emergency pull cords:** Red pull cords are missing in some accessible toilets and kitchens in student accommodation. **Res Life** may be well placed to support systematic logging and resolution.
- **Assistive technology gaps:** E-book Central does not work with assistive technology, and students would like access to reader pens in the library.
- **Clearer digital guidance:** Students would benefit from clearer guidance on using Blackboard resources and Library guides.
- **Positive development:** The Advisory Group welcomed the addition of accessibility indicators within the room-booking system

Accommodation

Our recent Term 2 survey showed 79% satisfaction with accommodation on Campus (with only 4% expressing dissatisfaction). Undeb Aberystwyth was pleased to see the expansion of accommodation options this year, allowing students to select lifestyle-based preferences such as single-sex and quiet-area living. The introduction of “quiet” blocks is particularly welcome given the increasing number of neurodiverse students who may be more sensitive to noise. These options have already proven popular and represent a positive step forward. The Students’ Union would welcome future expansion to include alcohol-free, religious-consideration, and LGBTQIA+-friendly living options, supporting a wider range of student needs and identities.

Students also reported issues with the room-selection system, where rooms appeared available but were no longer selectable by the time they attempted to confirm. If this is due to other students

selecting the rooms simultaneously, it would be helpful to clarify this within the system so it is understood as a practical limitation rather than a technical fault.

While we understand that Pantycelyn is the only catered hall and that historically there were issues with room vacancies, it remains a concern for Welsh-speaking students that individuals who do not speak Welsh, and have no intention of learning, are still able to live there. The University should take further action to ensure that students applying to live in Pantycelyn are Welsh speakers or learners (with clear commitment to living through the medium of Welsh) and make this explicitly clear during room selection. This is specifically important during Clearing or where people move during term time where we get a sense that the Whall language requirement is not as explicit or clear at those times.

The University could also explore introducing an English-language catered block elsewhere on campus, potentially by allocating a standard hall where students use a pre-paid meal card to access meals in the food hall (this could increase income for the university too).

Our Disabled Students Advisory Board also raised some concerns around notice of access with the University maintenance and security teams following maintenance requests through the standard maintenance form. After submitting the form, students report typically receiving no further communication and maintenance staff subsequently arrive without prior notice to carry out the repair.

Although staff do knock before entering, there is no advanced notice which goes against the principles of quiet enjoyment for any student, but there are additional impacts for disabled students. Many require time to prepare their space, manage support needs, or ensure they are in a safe and comfortable position to engage with visitors. Unannounced visits can therefore cause distress, disrupt routines, or in some cases make it impossible for students to accommodate the visit at all. The SU believes that maintenance access for any non-urgent repair request in halls should be no different to any other quiet enjoyment access and recommend that students should be notified at least 24 hours before with an estimated time window for attendance. Even a broad indication, such as a morning/afternoon slot or a specific day, would significantly improve accessibility and ensure compliance with legal obligations.

The 2024-25 Students' Union annual submission raised some challenges with the state of repair and quality of some on campus accommodation. Previously water leakage, mould, and the absence of a designated "social hub" were raised in Cwrt Mawr along with requests for more outside seating. The University has provided more benches outside of some halls but there are still some issues with drainage and mould.

"I'm also satisfied with my Rosser accommodation but it would be probably better if something was done to prevent mold occurrence in rooms and common area. I assume every summer services clean it but during the

academic year it's slowly spreading back even though recommendations are followed. The reason could be either because of the actual building conditions/construction/ location (it's often cold inside, takes time to make it warm and easily getting cold again) or not strong/clean enough fans in bathrooms" (student comment from the SU term 2 survey 2026

This year the University had a UUK Student Accommodation Code of Practice (SACOP) Audit. The UUK SACOP, first introduced in 2006, is a quality and safety standard for student accommodation. Universities are exempt from HMO licensing provided they sign up to an approved code of practice, of which the UUK SACOP is one. The Code outlines requirements for maintaining and managing student accommodation to ensure that students benefit from a high-quality living environment. The findings of this audit are confidential and therefore not appropriate to include in this report but the University could consider any recommendations from that in partnership with this report.

In contrast to university accommodation, while only 45% of respondents had experienced living in accommodation in town only 62% were satisfied.

Sports Facilities

The quality of available sports facilities is still an issue for students who use those spaces but we are understanding of the University's financial position to make any major changes to facilities in the near future. We still want to note that it will continue to impact student satisfaction and recruitment.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue developing and expanding the capacity for students to reserve accommodation aligned with their lifestyle preferences to include alcohol-free living, religious considerations, or LGBTQIA+-friendly options.

Recommendation 2: Where possible, continue to invest in small improvements that enhance the student experience such as increasing power outlet availability, adjustable lighting and accessibility of doors, lifts and steps (painted edges, even floors and textured railings), accessible route signage, reviewing campus lighting, emergency pull cord placement and offer some accessible campus tours

Recommendation 3: Ensure that University accommodation is fit for purpose and mould free, integrating findings from the UUK SACOP audit where appropriate.

Recommendation 4: students should be given at least 24 hours' notice, via email/text, for maintenance to enter their student halls to fix 'bespoke maintenance requests', requested via the maintenance form.

Recommendation 5: Consider how to ensure that Welsh language students are able to live their lives in the medium of Welsh in Pantycelyn. The University should take further action to ensure that students applying to live in Pantycelyn are Welsh speakers or learners (with clear commitment to living through the medium of Welsh) and make this explicitly clear during room selection. This is specifically important during Clearing or where people move during term time where we get a sense that the Welsh language requirement is not as explicit or clear at those times.

Employability and Skills Development

This section looks at how the university prepares students for employment or further study after their degree, covering things like careers guidance, personal development, and co-curricular opportunities.

Building on last year's efforts, the partnership between the Careers Service and Undeb Aber continues to grow and develop. This collaboration is yielding positive results, including the continued success of the Professional Pathways program and joint initiatives aimed at enhancing employability skills for students.

Careers support

In our term one survey 50% of participants were satisfied with careers and employability support with only 6% responding as dissatisfied (43% satisfied at the same time in 2024-25). However, by Term 2 this had shifted, with only 34% of respondents reporting satisfaction. Despite this drop, dissatisfaction remained low at 8%, while 28% of students said they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 30% reported that they had not yet experienced the service.

We have previously raised concerns about the general lack of awareness of the services offered by the Careers Service. These latest results suggest that satisfaction scores that are lower than we would all hope for may be less about negative experiences and more about limited engagement or visibility of perceived careers support. Strengthening communication, increasing the prominence of careers provision within programmes, and ensuring students understand what support is available would help address this gap and improve overall visibility of the valuable work that the Careers service provides.

Volunteering Award and Aber Skills award

From July 2025 to May 2026, over 16,500 hours have been logged on the SU volunteering platform, representing an increase from the 15,000 hours recorded in 2024-25. These hours have been earned across various activities, including society and club committees, Academic Rep roles, Volunteer Officer positions, as well as general volunteering activities, both involving and not involving Undeb Aber.

This year, 250 students registered as volunteers on the SU volunteer platform and recorded 987 skills gained, developed, and demonstrated as part of their roles (Committee members and Academic Reps are not automatically registered as part of their roles). While we know that this does not reflect the number of students volunteering as Committee members and Academic Reps (which total around 600-700 individuals) this remains on a par with previous years registration numbers.

This year, following last year's annual report recommendation, we worked closely with the University's Careers & Employability Service and our website provider MSL to adapt our Volunteering platform so that students can now record paid work hours and skills, as well as volunteering hours. This enables students to work towards a Skills Award by logging a minimum of 60 hours of work and volunteering, tracking the skills they develop, attending development sessions and reflecting on their growth.

The development work was only recently completed, so the new functionality has only been promoted to Professional Pathways students rather than rolled out University-wide. At this early stage, only a small number of students have logged skills gained through paid employment. However, it is highly likely that Professional Pathways students will review and log the skills gained during their full-time placement block at the start of June. This will provide valuable insight to inform wider implementation in the new academic year.

Since July 2025, our student volunteers have logged developing 1053 skills (1044 in 2024-25), including:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ● Communication: 190 | ● Problem-solving: 90 |
| ● Organisation: 150 | ● Personal Development: 54 |
| ● Teamwork: 93 | ● Mentoring: 31 |
| ● Leadership: 96 | ● Social Action: 48 |
| ● Training opportunities: 64 | ● Enterprise and Creativity: 27 |
| ● Digital Skills: 105 | ● Other: 19 |
| ● Practical Skills: 86 | |

Professional Pathways Internship Programme

The "Professional Pathways" scheme continues to be successful and in high demand with students. The scheme continues to support final-year undergraduate students to gain valuable insight into non-academic careers within the Higher Education sector. Internships are designed to boost confidence, enhance skills through training and development, support students to earn while they learn, and helps to prepare them for the workplace after graduation. Undeb Aber has been lucky enough to have been able to host 7 Professional Pathways participants who have developed valuable skills aligned with their interests and prospective career paths. These participants have been involved throughout the organisation, engaging in both behind-the-scenes work and front-facing roles.

This year we identified some confusion within a number of participating departments about the role and purpose of Professional Pathways students. In some cases, placement titles unintentionally overlapped with existing SU roles and responsibilities, creating uncertainty about boundaries. While these were a minority of placements, early exploration of placement focus also highlighted that some

students could be expected to develop projects or tasks that exceeded what could reasonably be expected given their skills, experience and knowledge base and the purpose of the programme.

In response, the SU has worked closely with Careers and the PVC (ESE) to ensure that future placement roles are designed in ways that do not conflict with, duplicate or unintentionally replace the work of other departments, and that expectations are aligned with the developmental purpose of the programme. Clearer communication and shared understanding of the intended scope of these placements will help ensure that students, departments, and the University all benefit from the scheme, strengthening placement quality and role clarity.

There was also confusion around whether volunteering could prohibit students from taking part in the scheme. The Students' Union understands the purpose of the scheme and why the limited number of places available need to be focussed on the most appropriate students that can most benefit however more consideration could be given to:

- Considering if there is a difference between skills gained through paid employment and the time spent in volunteering roles. Volunteering hours do not always provide the same skill, knowledge or confidence building opportunities as paid employment. In some volunteering placements, opportunities to build or evidence specific skills may be limited, inconsistent, or difficult to document. By contrast, paid employment often involves clearer responsibilities, defined expectations and more formalised skill use, making it easier for students to demonstrate development.
- If volunteering experience is to affect eligibility, then it would be beneficial to clarify and publicise how volunteering experience affects eligibility for the scheme. This could include:
 - Being explicit in programme eligibility descriptors
 - Asking applicants to outline any volunteering experience directly and explicitly.
 - Checking with the Students' Union whether an applicant holds an SU-based volunteer role. While this would not capture volunteering undertaken outside the Undeb platform, it would ensure that Academic Reps, committee members, and other SU volunteers are treated consistently, and that decisions are based on accurate information.

Employability Events/Employability skills and Graduate skills

The success of Careers Fest has been received very positively by the student body. Undeb Aber advocates for additional events of this nature, as they have a positive impact for students. Although the turnout for these events may sometimes be lower than ideal, the students who participate are highly appreciative of the opportunities provided. Undeb Aber encourages students to attend such events, especially departmental ones.

Careers schemes that focus on students from minoritised or disadvantaged groups such as 'Flourish' and 'Ysgogi' continue to be advantageous to the students involved. Flourish supports final-year undergraduate students who identify as female to build confidence, develop career narratives, and connect with a community of inspiring peers and professionals. Ysgogi is a two-day programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic students at Aberystwyth University, designed to build confidence, strengthen identity, and develop career-ready skills. Engaged students have reported being able to express themselves freely in a safe space and that the events and schemes made a positive difference for them, enabling students to network outside of their comfort zone and engage with external opportunities. There is a need for more of these safe spaces to develop students' skills and voices, and to build confidence in their individual identities.

The University has been developing strategies to support students in building graduate skills, with the aim of helping them map their academic journey to eight core employability attributes and digital capabilities valued by employers. When asked how confident they feel in articulating their strengths and skills to future employers or education providers, 64% of respondents reported feeling confident, with 35% of these students in their final year. While this level of confidence is encouraging, it does not necessarily demonstrate that students are actually able to articulate their skills effectively, and without this being demonstrated it is possible that some of this confidence is misplaced.

One of the key challenges in developing graduate skills is that many of these attributes are most effectively gained through volunteering or paid work placements, where students can build depth of experience. However, there is a lack of paid employment opportunities in Aberystwyth that would enable students to develop the desired graduate and digital skills. As a result, only those with the free time, financial stability, and confidence to engage in voluntary opportunities can access these experiences when they are extracurricular (outside of study programme and/or not worth academic credit). This risks creating unequal access to skill-building opportunities and highlights the need to strengthen structured, accessible skill-development pathways within credited programmes or opportunities.

Employment opportunities for students

There are limited opportunities for students to gain paid work experience in Aberystwyth, which also exacerbates cost-of-living pressures. In our Term 2 survey, 33% of students reported doing some form of paid work, despite 49% reporting that they were struggling financially. As noted earlier in this report, we do not believe that students who are struggling financially are choosing not to work, rather, many simply cannot find employment.

"I haven't been able to find employment until this month", "It is very difficult to find work on a student visa. Employers openly discriminate." (student comments from the SU term 2 survey 2026)

A lack of available employment opportunities limits students' ability to develop key employability skills and may also affect recruitment and retention (as they may favour or need to choose locations where jobs are available). The Students' Union recognises that this is not an issue that the University can resolve easily as much is impacted by our location and available local opportunities. However, recent restructures and redundancies have reduced the number of student jobs within the University itself. The Students' Union currently has 13 FTE appointed paid roles, plus three 6–8 hour per week student-only appointed roles. In recent years, we have adapted two roles to 0.5 FTE to make them accessible to students, and we have accommodated flexible working requests that have enabled two FTE roles to be held by current Aberystwyth PhD students. This demonstrates that student-friendly employment models are possible with thoughtful design. The University could consider whether future vacancies might be adapted to be suitable for students, helping to reintroduce and expand paid opportunities on campus for student part time work. This would support both skill development and financial resilience, strengthening student employability pathways.

Looking ahead, Undeb Aber could explore ways to work with the careers and employability service to identify and promote local employment opportunities for students and consider whether adapting the volunteering module further would allow us to advertise paid work more visibly alongside volunteering opportunities. This could help students access a broader range of skill-building experiences, particularly in a town where employment options are limited.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase visibility and continue to embed career touchpoints within academic programmes.

Recommendation 2: Continue delivering the Career Readiness and Professional Pathways schemes, while strengthening clarity and consistency by:

1. Improving role design and approval processes to ensure placements do not overlap with SU roles or the responsibilities of other departments.
2. Considering and clarifying whether volunteering experience impacts eligibility criteria so students clearly understand whether and how volunteering experience affects access to the scheme.
3. Checking SU-based volunteer roles where relevant to ensure consistent decisions and avoid disadvantaging students who declare volunteering compared with those who do not.

Recommendation 3: Continue with employability and confidence development schemes such as Hackathons, Ysgogi and Flourish which students report as confidence-building and transformative.

Recommendation 4: Consider where student employability opportunities could be increased in the University when vacancies arise. If possible, the SU could collaborate with the Careers and Employability Service to identify paid part time work opportunities and explore working with MSL to continue to adapt the Volunteering module to advertise paid work as well as volunteering opportunities. Helping students to access part time paid work would support graduate skills development and confidence building but would also help tackle the cost of living for students.

Recommendation 5: Promote the Skills Award to final year students. Explore where to embed opportunities to develop core graduate employability skills as part of the curriculum (in recognition that students with less “free time” are less able to develop as “extra-curricular” activity) and/or work with the SU to consider where appropriate volunteering could earn academic credit. The SU could also map the graduate skills to existing core volunteer Committee and Academic Rep activities.

Summary of Recommendations

Student Voice

Recommendation 1: Academic Reps should have consistent opportunities to connect with their cohort and introduce themselves physically at the start of key in person classes. Departments should work with the SU to ensure photos and some brief info about individual Academic Reps is physically displayed within key spaces.

Recommendation 2: Greater consistency in how SSCC Chairs share minutes, including attendance, with the Students' Union would help us identify patterns and understand where additional support for Reps may be needed. Any general feedback on how we can help Reps engage more effectively would also enable us to make targeted improvements.

We also encourage Departments to collaborate with Academic Reps when interpreting student feedback, SES comments and scoring, rather than positioning Reps solely as messengers passing information on. Collaborative review leads to clearer understanding of issues and more meaningful action.

Recommendation 3: Undeb to continue with the TFTS Academic Community and expand to include another department to consider how it could be the future of academic representation.

Recommendation 4: The University should continue to work in partnership with the SU to develop effective student led voice mechanisms, supporting the SU to be a primary voice for students where appropriate and continuing to avoid duplication of roles or activity. As part of this the SU could expand the Unitu pilot and continue its commitment to share student insight in 2026-27 including re-running the induction survey (to be developed in close partnership with the University), our Advisory Boards and the term 1 and term 2 surveys.

Learning and Teaching

Recommendation 1: We continue to emphasise the importance of accessible teaching, building on last year's findings. Students report that practices such as publishing materials in advance, recognising different engagement needs, and creating environments where they feel free to move, tic, or be themselves make a meaningful difference to their learning. While many staff already model strong inclusive practice, students believe further progress is both possible and necessary. Embedding these approaches more consistently would strengthen accessible teaching across the University.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that Welsh-language materials are uploaded and available consistently alongside the English versions, with clear communication for current and future students about where to find them. Strengthening Welsh-language parity will support accessibility, clarity, and confidence for Cymraeg-medium learners.

Recommendation 3: Where a student has a disclosed disability, academics should work with the University's accessibility team to explore whether hybrid or remote attendance could be offered as a reasonable adjustment when a condition affects their ability to travel to campus. This should be considered as part of developing a disabled student's learning and teaching plan.

Recommendation 4: Timetabling continues to present challenges, particularly around clustered lectures, long days with limited or no breaks, weak connections between sessions and assessment, and the impact of multiple assignment deadlines falling close together during teaching time. Assessment briefs should be available as early as possible (with all details necessary) to support attendance.

Recommendation 5: In the absence of TUN, the University should work with the Students' Union to introduce live anonymous feedback options for lecturers during class time, enabling students to flag barriers without speaking out. The University could also proactively collaborate with the SU and Unitu to support disabled students to report accessibility issues outside of class time.

Recommendation 6: The University should update its Welsh-medium module descriptions to clearly state which elements: seminars, lectures, and assessments, are delivered in Welsh. Current descriptions are unclear. With new Coleg Cymraeg guidelines now available, adopting them would ensure students receive an accurate picture of the Welsh-medium offer.

Assessment and Feedback

Recommendation 1: Consider whether any further insight is needed on how to improve feedback so that more students feel confident to read it. Perhaps working with student accessibility service and considering it with teaching and learning plans for disabled students and/or offering the choice of written or recorded feedback or the opportunity to discuss face to face. Review whether feedback engagement differs for final assessments. If significantly fewer students read feedback on final assignments, the University may wish to explore whether students could opt for reduced or lighter-touch feedback at this stage, which could help manage marking load while still meeting student needs.

Recommendation 2: To review the UAP procedure in consideration of AI to prioritise fairness, consistency between departments (including the use of AI tool use statements as this is inconsistent)

and to strive to resolve UAP cases more quickly, especially ahead of examination periods. In addition to consistent rules between departments, we would also like to see parity between acceptable AI use for students and staff.

Recommendation 3: Remove re-sit fees and caps and ensure that any removal of caps applies regardless of the year a student started their course. Communication about the removal should be clear and consistent.

Recommendation 4: Implement the "fit to sit" policy as soon as possible and provide a clear sense of when it will be considered again and the work being undertaken to clarify the policy. In the meantime, students would benefit from clearer guidance on special circumstances impact statements, with examples and accessible explanations that help them to create impact statements more effectively. This should be paired with greater consistency in how departments interpret and assess impact statements to ensure fair and equitable decision-making across the University. It should also be noted that removing reassessment fees and caps will significantly mitigate the impact of Special Circumstances on students, as they will no longer be financially or academically penalised for poorer performance arising from legitimate difficulties.

Recommendation 5: Reduce assessment bunching by ensuring deadlines are spaced more evenly across modules and provide assessment briefs at the start of teaching blocks well help students to plan their workload more effectively and may improve attendance at lectures.

It may also be beneficial to explore aligning deadlines across departments. Standardised submission times could discourage unhealthy working patterns, reduce the pressure that leads to "all-nighter" behaviour, and ensure students can resolve queries while academic staff are more likely to be available.

Support and Guidance

Recommendation 1: Ensure that measures are in place to review and publicise hidden or additional course costs, including often-overlooked aspects such as equipment costs and additional transportation expenses.

Recommendation 2: Continue to work with Undeb Aberystwyth to tackle the Cost of Living on Campus where possible. This includes keeping an affordable meal option and increasing the ability for students to heat and eat their own food on Campus, considering the impact of transport to campus, and recognising the impact anxieties and paid work are having on student wellbeing, mental health, and academic performance.

Recommendation 3: Remove reassessment/resit fees as soon as possible for all students.

Recommendation 4 Continue to review and update the published “typical costs of living in Aber” each year to ensure they remain accurate and realistic, enabling students to make informed decisions and understand the costs they will be expected to meet while studying and living in Aberystwyth.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that all student-facing support information is updated over the summer to reflect post-restructure changes, so that incoming students in the new academic year have clear, accurate and accessible guidance on where to find help. Increasing students’ awareness of available support remains a strategic priority, and timely updates will significantly improve clarity and confidence in navigating student support services.

Facilities and Resources

Recommendation 1: Continue developing and expanding the capacity for students to reserve accommodation aligned with their lifestyle preferences to include alcohol-free living, religious considerations, or LGBTQIA+-friendly options.

Recommendation 2: Where possible, continue to invest in small improvements that enhance the student experience such as increasing power outlet availability, adjustable lighting and accessibility of doors, lifts and steps (painted edges, even floors and textured railings), accessible route signage, reviewing campus lighting, emergency pull cord placement and offer some accessible campus tours

Recommendation 3: Ensure that University accommodation is fit for purpose and mould free, integrating findings from the UUK SACOP audit where appropriate.

Recommendation 4: students should be given at least 24 hours’ notice, via email/text, for maintenance to enter their student halls to fix ‘bespoke maintenance requests’, requested via the maintenance form.

Recommendation 5: Consider how to ensure that Welsh language students are able to live their lives in the medium of Welsh in Pantycelyn. The University should take further action to ensure that students applying to live in Pantycelyn are Welsh speakers or learners (with clear commitment to living through the medium of Welsh) and make this explicitly clear during room selection. This is specifically important during Clearing or where people move during term time where we get a sense that the Welsh language requirement is not as explicit or clear at those times.

Employability and Skills development

Recommendation 1: Increase visibility and continue to embed career touchpoints within academic programmes.

Recommendation 2: Continue delivering the Career Readiness and Professional Pathways schemes, while strengthening clarity and consistency by:

1. Improving role design and approval processes to ensure placements do not overlap with SU roles or the responsibilities of other departments.
2. Considering and clarifying whether volunteering experience impacts eligibility criteria so students clearly understand whether and how volunteering experience affects access to the scheme.
3. Checking SU-based volunteer roles where relevant to ensure consistent decisions and avoid disadvantaging students who declare volunteering compared with those who do not.

Recommendation 3: Continue with employability and confidence development schemes such as Hackathons, Ysgogi and Flourish which students report as confidence-building and transformative.

Recommendation 4: Consider where student employability opportunities could be increased in the University when vacancies arise. If possible, the SU could collaborate with the Careers and Employability Service to identify paid part time work opportunities and explore working with MSL to continue to adapt the Volunteering module to advertise paid work as well as volunteering opportunities. Helping students to access part time paid work would support graduate skills development and confidence building but would also help tackle the cost of living for students.

Recommendation 5: Promote the Skills Award to final year students. Explore where to embed opportunities to develop core graduate employability skills as part of the curriculum (in recognition that students with less “free time” are less able to develop as “extra-curricular” activity) and/or work with the SU to consider where appropriate volunteering could earn academic credit. The SU could also map the graduate skills to existing core volunteer Committee and Academic Rep activities.