**President Report for the Annual General Meeting**

**1st May 2025**

This paper is an amalgamation of my Student Council and Trustee Board reports.

**November 2024 (Trustee)**

This is the first Students Union Board Paper I have written as President of the Newman Students' Union. It was an honour to be elected into the post. Writing this, I am excited to be graduating with my Law degree on Monday, 28th October.

Some highlights since I have been in the office are attending Lead & Change, which was an excellent opportunity to meet new Sabbatical Officers and network. Our Welcome Week was a resounding success, and the positive feedback we received via a survey indicates it was well-received by students (a copy of the survey is a separate item in the papers). I was pleased with the Think Tank I held for Black History Month that helped shape the Union's celebration with 'My Black History', a montage of different students' perspectives on their black history, this will be shown in a premier on campus and shared on socials. More recently with my fellow Sabbital Officer, we attended the National Union of Students (NUS) lobby day in Parliament, meeting MP Liam Conlon who appeared to understand the student movement and indicated he would take some matters to the Secretary of State.

In August, the Union Director re-wrote our Constitution, and the Union received Leadership & Management training from Blue Edge Training and had a Team-building day at Bartley Green Sailing Club. This allowed us to build our relationships before students started back.

Upon my participation in the FED and FASPS committees, I identified disparities in the Course Rep system. To address this, I took a proactive approach and initiated a survey of the Academics. The question posed was, 'What is working well? What is not working well? What could improve the course rep system?' The overwhelming response was 'Students'. This proactive approach reassures us that we are actively working to improve the student experience.

We hoped to recruit ten part-time officers in the October elections but successfully recruited eight. The two unelected seats are postgraduate and campaigns and communications officers.

Recently, I took the issues around Appeals to the University, the Unions' Advice Centre had been receiving issues around this matter, which I felt was going too far. The University acted outside its policy, and I felt this needed to be addressed. The University is looking into this, and I have asked for feedback on the outcome and any changes they make, so we are aware. There have also been enrolment issues, and the Advice Centre is working on a report, so these matters should go to the Student Experience Task Group.

I have already established some of my Manifesto pledges; fostering broader communities is one I hope to leave as a legacy. Community engagement is on the rise, and this can be seen in the different students who are now socialising or taking their lunch in the Union space; notwithstanding, the Union space has now been re-arranged to be more welcoming. I am attracting student feedback per my pledge of 'Cuppa & Chat', and the free personal training sessions work well. I will soon get Neighbourly, which facilitates the distribution of surplus food.  These changes are making me feel very positive.

This format seemed to work for previous officers and provided a pretty good template/ material for Council Reports to the Student Council/ University Council.

The forthcoming plan is to meet with the faculty representative once a month, a crucial step in understanding the student voice better. The Part-Time Officers are due to receive their training, and then those who I am responsible for will be supported in implementing their manifestations and working to implement both mine and the Vice Presidents. I will be raising awareness of Diabetes on World Diabetes Day on 14th November, St Basils Sleepout on 29th November, The Big Quiz, and the Christmas Grotto underway.

**December (Student Council)**

I am meeting with my sub-committee fortnightly. They take their roles seriously, and I am very proud of their actions. The Academic Affairs Officer is well underway with getting the university's policy on recording lectures underway and sending a survey out to students on this matter. The Access & Inclusion Officer has taken a student's issues to Estates who have responded with some reasonable outcomes and met with the Disability & Inclusion manager about the needs of students with specific learning difficulties, with plans to also send a survey to students. The Union Chair has received training on how to Chair this Student Council. As a sub-committee, we have drafted a letter to Chief Financial Officer to the university about potential unethical business partnerships and also we have been researching potential alternatives for Starbucks and are still working on this.

A staff member stopped me recently to say they had to do a double take at the amount and diversity of students sitting in the Union space.

I am chasing Estates on where a fridge freezer can go, to enable me to get Neighbourly; the distribution of surplus food on the ground. As well as networking with Act-On Energy to help students with energy savings.

I had one meeting with the faculty representatives, which was not well attended, but I supported the plans the reps had that attended, such as holding 'sofa surgeries' or their cohort of course reps. New dates will be put in place for the new year.

World Diabetes Day on 14th November was a success. I had support from a lecturer in Adult Nursing and two volunteers from Diabetes UK. We had a decent amount of engagement from students and staff. The Union recorded a video on how we can support (but not limited to) parent carers. Some students who passed the stand were unaware they could get support with extensions from the Union, so this is a positive.

**January 2025 (Trustee, was supposed to take place December)**

This is the second and final paper board paper I will write in 2024 as President of the Newman Students' Union.

Attending a Student Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC), it was brought to my attention that some students are unhappy with how the Dean Award is allocated. The Dean's Award goes to the top 1% of students for academic achievement. However, this needs to be taken into consideration for students who are undertaking a yearlong assignment. Discussing this with the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Students he was happy for me to research the finer details and see if there is a way this award could be more equitable. I contacted a  Management Information Officer in Planning Systems & Development, who supported my request. We have a meeting scheduled to discuss this further.

I was unhappy with how students gave feedback on their experience with their interactions with the Help Desk. So I went in and spoke to them. It became apparent they were unhappy too on various issues; communication and understanding were quite prevalent. I took this to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students. In conjunction with Quality, some positive actions are being taken to improve student experience.

A recent FED Faculty Board meeting discussed how SSCC information is shared with students. Which, currently, needs to be better circulated. In the meantime, I have asked the Governance Co-ordinator to pick out trends in the minutes we receive and add them to the Union website. I have also met with the Interim Head of E-Learning to discuss ways to share these on Moodle. The Interim Head of E-Learning supports my idea and is happy to attend my meeting with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students in January to discuss the finer details of what is involved from the E-learning end.

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The Black History Month' My Black History', a montage of different students' perspectives, is nearly finished. We would like to have a group discussion with these students. I potentially want this work to be shared in the broader network and will look into this after Christmas.

We have many events in the lead-up to Christmas. A Jolly Jumper Day – raising and giving to Birmingham Children's Hospital, Festive Film Night, Newman Christmas Night Out, Christmas Quiz, Pyjama Party, Santa's Grotto, Little Red Riding Hood and Open Mic Christmas Night. Sadly, the St Basils Sleepout on 29th November did not go ahead.

**February 2025 (Student Council)**

The Christmas break, semester start dates and I having to attend an Advance HE training day for my role on University Council meant we did not get to have our first sub- committee meeting until 5th February 2025. Despite this, the members have been continuously working on their areas.

**Access & Inclusion Officer:**

* In talks with the library about promoting how they and Student Support, support the needs of students with specific learning difficulties
* Sent a survey to students about accessibility on campus
* Has been working in collaboration with Community and Well-being sub committee on quite spaces on campus and delivered a ‘Sensory First Aid’ workshop in Well-Being Week
* They are planning an on campus event on 6th March in aid of International Wheelchair Day which Is on 1st March.

**Academic Affairs Officer**

* Attended the digital learning task group.
* Met with Faculty Reps to learn how they engage with Course Reps and to see if there were ways to improve engagement with the Union.
* Ensuring lecturers are promote their office hours
* Is in talks with IT to hopefully ensure all software is downloaded before a semester begins/ ensuring this task is not taking up lesson time. Particularly for Computer Science and Psychology programmes.
* In collaboration with Community and Well-Being subcommittee has set up weekly Newman Student Union’s Study Group.
* Is co presenting with the President in a workshop about Time Management.

**The Union Chair**

* Attended the Unions Away Day and Trustee Board, participated in Boards purpose & effectiveness and the future of the Board and Trustee recruitment.

**President Update**

* Working with Planning Systems and Development and Quality to make The Dean's Award more equitable.
* Amendments have been made on the student experience at the Help Desk. The Union Director, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Students, Quality and Head of Campus and Commercials have been working on this.
* Working on how to improve the feedback loop from SSCC. Following a short survey it does not appear all course reps are given the same treatment when gathering information, I will raise with the PVC students.
* Cost of Living: I have a new contact in Sandwell Council who I hope will be able to share cost of living support for students. I am putting on a Money Management workshop during National Students Money Week in March.
* ‘My Black History' film screening was a success. Amira Campbell NUS Presentist chaired the Q&A panel which was superb.
* Due to start the One-Hour Project; mentoring scheme. Once I understand the advantages of this, I will help Careers promote it to students.

**April 2025 (Trustee)**

Update on the Deans Award – this will now be more equitable, and more students could benefit from the changes. The Deans Award, gives the top 1% of students recognition for their work in semester one of the academic year, will now consider people with year-long placements and Inclusion Deadline Agreement (IDA).  As this might not be ready for the Students' Union Awards for final year students, it has been agreed with the Graduation Team that the Award will be given when students collect their graduation certificate, albeit there is not a presentation for this, however, the SU will inform final year students that this will be the case in the SU Awards promotion material.

A consistent approach to SSCC’s across the faculties are still being looked into.

Work has started to improve the access for wheelchair users at the Hilda entrance, thanks to our Access & Inclusion Officer.

I am no further forward with the Neighbourly initiative, as I have been re-elected for the next academic year. I will discuss this with the Estates Team to see how it can be set up.

Amira Campbell, President of the NUS, chaired the My Black History event. The panel discussion provided the participants a voice to get their perspectives and points of view across in an open environment; the Pro-Vice Chancellor attend the event and commended all in their work to bring this to life.

I have been a part of the Independent Council Member Recruitment, for the university; appointing two new members. At the last University Council meeting, I wanted to start the conversation around students and council members connecting. It was agreed that a Twilight session would be put on to provide a space for this, and I am in talks with the Clerk to Council to set this up.

Here are some student-facing events/workshops I have led this semester

•              All student 'Town Hall' meetings for feedback.

•              Time Management & Money Management Workshops.

•              Collaborated with lectures in the Faculty of Education Department to organise a fundraising event for Cystic Fibrosis, raising £756

•              Dissertation Participation Fair

The Union Director and I are planning the end-of-year summer event. However, this will likely be a low-key event this academic year, focusing on starting a Student Committee at the beginning of the next academic year and enabling students to lead in certain areas.

The elections were fun. There were some changes to the process, but this did not affect the voter turnout, which was up by 3%. Interestingly, some students were unaware of what the Union and Universities initiatives i.e. the pantry during campaigning. I will start to engage more students by taking more time during the week to actively be in different areas around campus reaching different students. I understand that a few students initially put themselves forward to run for the President role. Going forward, it would be worthwhile for students interested in the full-time officer positions to have the opportunity to shadow the people in the role to gauge a real-life understanding of what the role entails.

I am on the E6 Sexual Harassment & Sexual Midconundt workstreams and have training to undertake as part of this.

I am happy to report that the Advice Co-Ordinator has started a new page on the Union website to promote students who are looking for people to rent spaces together: <https://www.newmansu.org/advice/studentaccommodation/>

I enjoyed my 360-degree appraisal and look forward to building on the feedback to become a better President.

Lastly, I am thrilled that the Union is up for Students’ Union of the Year at the WhatUni Choice Award; a massive achievement for the Union, highlighting the work of the Team and having students best interests at heart.

Written by Gemma Bowen