



# Supporting our students through University life

BEDS SU IMPACT REPORT 2020/2021





# A Message from Laura and Quadri

## CO-PRESIDENTS – BEDS SU

We are pleased to share with you the Beds SU Impact Report for the academic year 2020/21. It has been a year of change and focus brought about by both our ambitions set out in the 2019/20 report and the input and support of our student community here at the University of Bedfordshire (UoB).

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our members has been lasting and significant. We stepped up our efforts to bring forward their interests and concerns at every level. Despite our venues being closed, we maintained a high level of virtual support for our students whilst maintaining campus operations as much as possible.

Our students wanted to see greater representation from the Executive Officers which we delivered by redefining the roles to now comprise two elected Co-Presidents and two elected Co-Vice Presidents of Campus Engagement & Equality. These roles are now held equally by self-identifying men/non-binary and self-identifying women.

Work commenced on our plans to launch a new look brand with the ambition of delivering an identity that better reflected the diversity of our student body, and a website that offered greater opportunities to showcase student stories and content that reflected their journey here at UoB.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff here at Beds SU for their hard work and continued dedication in supporting our students during these challenging times. We'd also like to thank our stakeholders, the University, our external partners and our amazing student volunteers for your time, energy, and support through this past year, along with your feedback and approval of our new four-year strategy. We look forward to sharing our progress on this next year.

*Laura & Quadri*

## A HIGHLY COMMENDED STUDENTS' UNION

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Silver

NUS Green Impact Students' Unions  
**GOOD AWARD**  
Delivered by Students Organising for Sustainability - UK





# Student Voice

Our Students' feedback shaping our ambition and focus for the future

In 2020/21 our ongoing commitment to reach students wherever they were based and offering everyone the opportunity to share their views – be it through forums, feedback channels or elections – led us to make some significant changes to our Student Voice ambition.

## Student Voice Forums

These fully online forums were launched for each school/department within the university. They offered students and staff alike a dedicated space to reflect on the feedback and co-create in-course solutions for students. These sessions proved to be a huge success amongst all student groups, including those previously hard to reach.

In total we held 43 forums across three terms, firstly in October/November 2020 then February/March and April/May 2021. Over the course of these sessions, we spoke to over 300 students.

Feedback gathered at these sessions was shared with the university and led to several key changes including:

- A U-turn on degree algorithm.
- The introduction of a series of measures to support and protect students learning and assessments through the pandemic known as the student 'safety net'.
- A review of the registration process.



# Elections

Insight from our students in 2020 made it clear that many didn't feel represented by the Exec Officers positions and change was needed. In response we held a student referendum, ahead of the 2021 Student Elections, asking students to vote on whether they wanted the positions to remain as they were, or change to ensure two posts were always held by students who identified as women and two held by those who identified as men/non-binary. Our students gave us a strong directive that they supported change with a turnout of 820 students (4.9% of membership) and 85% in favour. As a result, we revised our Exec Officer roles to include two elected Co-Presidents and two elected Co-Vice Presidents of Campus Engagement & Equality.

We also made changes to our voting system and believe we achieved a first for students' unions in England, through the implementation of a "campus vote" system. Loosely based upon the

American electoral colleges system where each campus was worth a number of "campus votes", and the eventual winners needed to achieve more campus votes than their competitors. We weighted our votes to amplify the voices of students on our smaller campuses and saw the votes rise significantly. A good example of this was at Milton Keynes campus, where there was a 16% increase in the vote.

We are pleased to share that despite the challenges of Covid – our carefully planned online only Elections – delivered strong results with turnout up 4% to 16% of eligible students (2019/20 – 12%) and the number of votes rose by a third to 2,647. We also welcomed the first ever elected officer from our London Bridge campus.





# Student Voice Partnership

## 3 WAYS TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Improvements to both ours and the university's feedback options were also introduced within the year. Together we launched a simplified system titled '3 ways to have your voice heard'. This new approach supported by both us and the university comprises three categories:

**TALK TO YOUR REP**

**FEEDBACK ONLINE**

**ATTEND A MEETING**

We have been really pleased with the initial results and there is clear evidence that the new system better suits the needs of our students.

# Student Representatives

In the summer of 2020, we also committed time to conducting a review of our Academic Rep system. Insight from students and staff led us to create a new simpler structure composed of Course Reps and School Reps, offering students two clearly defined representative roles to share their views with and who in turn now act as a conduit for escalating feedback to the university.



# Project Reach Out

## SUPPORTING THE WELLBEING OF OUR STUDENTS

Born out of a desire to keep in touch with students during lockdown when campuses were largely closed, we launched Project Reach Out. We enlisted the support of our student staff to carry out calls to our students across all year groups in a bid to gain insight into their fellow students wellbeing during the pandemic.

Student staff were trained in basic telephony customer service and signposting, with an escalation process to full-time staff established

for unresolved issues/queries. Phone calls were largely well-received by students at a time when they had otherwise struggled to make contact with the university, and our student staff loved being able to connect with their fellow students, albeit remotely. The insight garnered during this first phase played a key role in the induction programme of our 2021/22 Exec Officer team and supporting initiatives within the university.

## STUDENT FORUMS

 **43**  
STUDENT FORUMS HELD

 **300+**  
STUDENTS PARTICIPATED

## REFERENDUM

 **820**  
STUDENTS VOTED

 **85%**  
IN FAVOUR OF CHANGE

## PROJECT REACH OUT

 **3,372**  
STUDENTS CALLED

 **886**  
CONVERSATIONS  
TOOK PLACE

## ELECTIONS

 **16%**  
TURNOUT UP 4%  
(12% 2019/20)

VOTES ROSE BY  
1/3 TALLING  
 **2,647**

## STUDENT REPS

 **36%**  
NUMBER OF REPS  
TRAINED UP 10% (2019/20)

 **66%**  
NUMBER OF REPS  
UP 10% (2019/20)

## LISTENING TO OUR STUDENTS

Each May we conduct an annual Beds SU student survey to find out what matters most to our students, capture how well we are working to support them and to offer us insight into where we need to improve. The following stats give a snapshot of data gathered from the survey.



**82.8%**

of students were most aware of the 'talk to your Rep' out of the 'three ways to have your voice heard' system



**62.2%**

of participants claimed to be satisfied with the SU



**52%**

of students consider themselves to be a member of the SU (down by 10.3% on previous year. Possible impact of the Covid 19 pandemic)



**82.5%**

of participants overwhelmingly prefer to receive information from the SU via their student email



# Student Community

Offering our students an opportunity to try new things, meet new friends, celebrate achievements, and raise awareness

2020/21 was a tough year for our societies. With campuses closed, and ongoing Covid restrictions in place for much of the year, the opportunities for face-to-face meetings and events were significantly reduced. However, our societies rose to the challenge, continuing to find online opportunities to engage with old and new members alike.





## Case Study

This year's Society of the Year was awarded to the Paramedic Society. Tom Walker-Mogdridge, Chairperson, shares an overview of their focus, commitment and achievements this year.

The Paramedic Society is aimed at all Paramedic Science BSc Students to support a positive experience and learning at university through student led activities. Due to the pandemic most of interactions this year were via online group chats.

A key achievement for us as a society this year was the delivery of the Practice Assessment Support Handbooks that allowed students to have a physical reminder of the skills that they had to achieve during their placements.

*Having the opportunity to direct your own student experience and learning through the society is a privilege like no other. We've been able to literally do anything we wanted to support our learning.*



43



**NUMBER OF  
ACTIVE SOCIETIES**  
(same as 2019/20)

9



**NUMBER OF  
NEW SOCIETIES**  
(-1 on previous year)

576



**NUMBER OF  
STUDENT SIGN-UPS**  
(359 unique students)

TOP  
3



**MOST POPULAR  
SOCIETIES**  
Paramedic Society  
Midwifery Society  
Enactus





## Celebrating those who go the extra mile

Our annual Beds SU Awards offers us a perfect opportunity to celebrate students and staff who have gone the extra mile to support the student community, and in 2021 we witnessed more greatness from student groups and individuals despite the pandemic and limited time together. We were delighted to see 142 nominations for 93 individuals and groups from students and staff. Once again, celebrations were a virtual affair, in the form of a short film honouring the winners and highly commended individuals and groups.

We showcased the film across our social media channels and to date it has been viewed over 200 times. We wanted to take this opportunity once again to thank all who were nominated for their dedication to supporting the student experience here at the University of Bedfordshire.



### AWARDS

**STUDENT COMMUNITY  
REP OF THE YEAR**  
Chole Watson

**VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**  
Jasmin Rowe

**SOCIETY OF THE YEAR**  
Paramedic Society

**GO GREEN AWARD**  
Sreenidhi Padmanaban

### ACADEMIC REPS OF THE YEAR

**CREATIVE ARTS,  
TECHNOLOGIES & SCIENCE**  
Francis James

**HEALTH & SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
Jacqueline Bunting

**EDUCATION & SPORT SCIENCES**  
Abbie Ingold

**UNIVERSITY OF BEDFORDSHIRE  
BUSINESS SCHOOL**  
Iris-Denisse Darvish



# Student Advice

## Here for our students whenever they need us

In last year's report we detailed how we'd been able to accelerate our digital plans, in part led by the pandemic but also by student demand. Having a fully digital support system in place over this past year helped us to further excel and enhance our offering to students.

Through both identifying themes of enquiries and feedback from our students we recognised that most academic enquiries could be handled at the initial point of contact. To support this, we explored several solutions, before deciding to invest in 'Freshdesk', a digital platform offering both a chat and quick response email service for students. Although the system was not launched until after this reporting period, finding a solution ahead of the new financial year ensured it would be in place for the busy summer period. We look forward to sharing more on how the system has further improved our services for students next year.

### REPORTING PERIOD AUGUST 2020 TO JULY 2021

During 2020/21 the advice team recorded a 24% increase on the previous year of enquiries and cases (604 and 535 respectively) totalling 1,139. The overwhelming majority of enquiries and cases were academic related with enquiries equating to 78.15% of all contacts and 82.24% of all cases.

	No. of Enquiries	No. of Cases
Academic	472 78.15%	440 82.24%
Finance	95 15.7%	58 10.84%
Housing	11 1.99%	11 2.06%
Misc	7 1.32%	10 1.87%
Safety	3 0.50%	6 1.12%
Wellbeing	11 1.99%	8 1.50%
Not Specified	5 0.99%	2 0.37%
Subtotal	604	535
Total	1139 (24% increase on last year)	



# Highlights

## How our Support team proactively responded to student feedback



Our students told us that having access to the team online had been a welcome addition to our services but for some in-person contact was still desired. We have committed to rolling out a fully blended approach for the new academic year (2021/22).

We also recognised a trend of students finding themselves in difficulties with their accommodation providers related to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. This included a number of students having signed contracts they were unable to honour.



Our response was to introduce a revised housing guide, which offered advice on their rights in this new world. We committed to launching the guide over the summer of 2021, ahead of the new academic year commencing.

We deepened our commitment to equality and diversity, organising 'gender intelligence' training for all Beds SU Staff, which has led some staff adopting 'preferred gender identification' in their organisational signature strips.







**189 HOURS  
OF DROP-IN  
SESSIONS  
OFFERED OVER THE  
YEAR**

**ONLINE  
VIDEO SESSIONS  
PROVED INCREASINGLY  
POPULAR  
FOR THE FOLLOWING  
GROUPS OF STUDENTS:**

**Satellite  
Campuses**

**Commuting  
Students**

**Student  
Parents**

**Students With  
Employment  
Responsibility**

## Student Testimony

*I don't know whether you remember my case, but I wanted to let you know after my appeal was upheld, I re did my assignment.*

*This was marked by a different marker and an external moderator had a look. This assignment passed; therefore, I passed the Post Grad Dip in Social Work.*

*I have started the registration process with Social Work England. Additionally, another strand to my story; because I had failed the course, my short-term contract would have ended in October 2020 because they had hired me in the ASYE role. I would have been out of a job.*

*An hour after I was informed of the positive outcome of the appeal, the managers of the team I worked for (and completed my placement with) offered me a role as a Parenting Worker until the appeal process, etc was completed.*

*Therefore, I was still able to earn an income for my family - my husband is self-employed and was unable to find work because of COVID-19 climate. Moving forward, fingers crossed, I will be approved by Social Work England, and I will move from the Parenting Worker role to the ASYE year in March 2021. I would, again, like to thank you for the invaluable, clear advice you gave me during the appeal process.*

*I really could not have done this without the wonderful, experienced, knowledgeable, and generous people like you.*

*The students are very lucky to have you. Wishing you all the best!*

# Student Events

Offering our students a vibrant and varied programme and places to socialise

This year has been a challenging a time for our venues, which remained closed for the entire financial year due to Covid-19 restrictions. This impacted us on several levels. We were unable to offer students a space to socialise, hire out our venues for private functions or offer our student staff job opportunities in our two campus settings. However, by utilising the Covid-19 job retention scheme we were able to financially support our student staff throughout the entire year.

We have also been able to support our international students by allowing them to take advantage of employment opportunities at the University by processing their payroll. This year we enabled international students to earn over £63,000 from the University.





# Events & Activities

THE METRO  
BAR & KITCHEN thehub

With our campuses closed, our commitment was to deliver a wealth of online events, activities and awareness campaigns including:



Live music and DJ sessions such as African and Bollywood live music sets as part of our 'Celebrating Culture at Beds' campaign.



Mental Health online workshops covering 'Worry & Stress', 'Starting Uni after Covid' and 'Balancing My Thoughts', as part of Mental Health Awareness Month.



Festive watch parties, a very popular weekly emoji quiz on Instagram, throughout December and festive virtual quiz nights.



We launched the 'We've Got You' campaign in collaboration with the university offering students a place to share their stories and experiences from 'How Covid changed me' and 'Balancing studies with childcare', as well as raising awareness of how we could support them and connect them to other students via communities or Student Network groups.

The take-up and engagement of activities ebbed and flowed but offered valuable insight into what our students wanted from us and helped shape our plans for our return to campus and future online offerings.

We also used this time to consider how we could make our venues work harder for students in various scenarios be it, daytime socials and evening events.

# Financials

## Working for students, not for profit

The pandemic presented financial challenges: with our venues suspended and the University unable to uplift their grant to us, annual turnover fell an estimated 18% from 2019/20.

However the charity began the year with a healthy reserve of £378k and this allowed us to protect the funding of student services when our students needed us the most. We planned to draw upon our reserve by £34k but closed the year with a deficit of £31k.

Expenditure	2021/22, £
Member Communications	178,674
Democratic Leadership	135,331
Employee Development	31,234
Charity Management	219,961
Organisation Costs	153,530
Membership Services	183,635
Costs Associated with Closed Venues	21,277
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>923,643</b>

Income	2021/22, £
Media & Marketing Sales Surplus	6,071
Block Grant	886,481
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>892,552</b>

<b>Year-End Position</b>	<b>-31,091</b>
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**CHARITY MANAGEMENT**  
£219,961 24%

**EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT**  
£31,234 3%

**DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP**  
£135,331 15%

**MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS**  
£178,674 19%

**COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH VENUE CLOSURES**  
£21,277 2%

**MEMBERSHIP SERVICES**  
£183,635 20%

**ORGANISATION COSTS**  
£153,530 17%

# Year Ahead

With you... on your journey



## In last year's report (2019/20) we committed to focus on:



Deliver a Whole Union approach to encourage a loud, responsive, and representative Student Voice on student issues.



Enable students to feel part of a community, connect them with other students and look out for them.



Ensure student interaction with the SU was on-demand, flexible and inclusive to all.

We are pleased that throughout this report we have been able to demonstrate the many ways in which we achieved these objectives, as well as sharing our plans to continue delivering against them in 2021/22.



For 2021/22 work will commence on how we meet our new objectives as set out in the new four-year (2021-2025) strategy, that builds on and compliments last year's objectives as detailed on the left. The overarching theme for our new plan is 'With you...on your journey' and will comprise four key areas:



## WITH YOU...

### IN YOUR COURSE

Supporting our students in their studies and informing them of the role we as their SU can play in this as well as ensuring their voices are heard.

## WITH YOU...

### IN YOUR STUDENT LIFE

Delivering a dynamic, engaging, and inclusive programme of events and activities throughout the year with something for everyone be it in person, online, day or night, and enhancing opportunities for individuals to share their stories.

## WITH YOU...

### TO CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE

Empowering our students to seek ways to improve their student experience and that we deliver an impactful, democratic, and representative Student Voice.

At the time of writing this report we are pleased to report that we have made good progress on all of these objectives. We have launched our new look website and brand, which can be seen throughout the design of this report. Initial plans to reshape our venue spaces, events programme, and the ways in which we support our students both in and out of the classroom have also commenced. We look forward to sharing more on these achievements in next's year's report.

## WITH YOU...

### WHEN YOU NEED SUPPORT

Finally, we want our students to know that we foster a caring and student-centred university community that will help them navigate all aspects of student life.



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