STUDENT COUNCIL REPORT 24/25 – MAY 2025
VICE PRESIDENT EDUCATION REPORT

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MANIFESTO UPDATE:

As we approach the end of the academic year, I'm proud to reflect on the progress we've made together on a number of key priorities. From strengthening the Student Rep system to influencing assessment policy and advocating for student wellbeing, it's been a busy and productive year. Here's an update on where things currently stand.

Assessment Feedback

One of the most consistent concerns raised by students over the years has been the quality and timeliness of assessment feedback. This issue has regularly featured in the National Student Survey (NSS), with students expressing frustration about unclear, delayed, or insufficient feedback. In response, I brought these concerns to the UWE/SU Partnership Board and then escalated them to the Learning and Teaching Forum alongside the Deputy Registrar. This resulted in the creation of a dedicated working group involving all College Deans and School Directors of Learning and Teaching, which has been meeting regularly to address the issue.

Through these discussions, it's become clear that feedback practices vary widely across schools. Some use structured templates while others are trying new formats as part of the UWE Programmes initiative. A major issue identified was the lack of "feedback literacy" among both staff and students. Many students don't fully understand how to use feedback effectively, and staff may approach feedback in inconsistent ways. This is something the group is working to tackle through both structural improvements and educational tools.

The group also pinpointed several practical challenges:

- Students often don't know when to expect feedback, where to find it, or how to raise concerns if it's delayed.
- We discussed ways to improve communication from module teams, including more transparency when delays occur.
- There was also broad agreement on the need to shift perceptions of feedback from something received *after* an assessment, to something embedded throughout the learning process. This will be addressed further through the Assessment Journey workstream.

To better define what "good" feedback looks like, we are co-developing a set of principles that will underpin future improvements. We've created a shared whiteboard where stakeholders are contributing ideas, and I'm also collaborating with the Dean of CBL to launch a student survey that will gather insights on what students value most in feedback (format, tone, level of detail, and accessibility).

Reasonable Adjustments to Deadline (RA2D)

Another major focus has been the recent changes to Reasonable Adjustments to Deadline, which saw the extension period reduced from 14 to 7 days. This shift, implemented from the start of the 2024/25 academic year and prompted significant concern from students and the SU, leading to the formation of a Task and Finish Group to review its impact.

Since its creation, the group has met regularly to gather data and insights. While two surveys were distributed, it was the targeted survey (sent to students registered with Disability Services and UWE Cares) that yielded the strongest response, with 404 participants. The feedback was clear: although some students managed with the new timeframe, many reported negative effects on their mental health and wellbeing.

Importantly, we've also made progress on improving the RA2D application process itself. In collaboration with UWE's IT team, a new system is being developed that will allow students to apply once per assessment period instead of per assessment. The new interface will display all eligible assessments in one place, significantly reducing admin for both students and staff. This is a huge step forward in accessibility and usability.

While student success data (e.g., pass rates and resit outcomes) didn't show any negative trends post-change, we know this only tells part of the story. Student wellbeing data and qualitative feedback remain crucial. As a result, the group has recommended maintaining the 7-day RA2D policy for now but will continue to investigate how to improve support for those affected. A sub-group is being created to focus on understanding support gaps and reviewing how Exceptional Circumstances procedures might better complement RA2D.

One important next step is renaming the policy to "Reasonable Adjustment to Coursework Deadline," to provide greater clarity. The group's final report will be submitted to the May Academic Board for review.

Final Student Rep Conference and Committee

On 1st May, I will be hosting the final Student Rep Conference of the year. We've invited guest speakers, the Dean of CBL to talk about feedback literacy, and the Student Voice and Academic Policy team will be presenting course survey data to help us understand trends and concerns across schools. Earlier in the day, I also chaired a Student Rep Committee meeting where reps can discuss what they've been seeing across their programmes and schools. These conversations are essential in making sure student voices are feeding directly into decision-making at the highest levels.

International Insights: Wonkhe Portugal Visit

Recently, the SU President and I travelled to Portugal as part of a Wonkhe-organised trip to learn from student representation systems abroad. We visited student unions in Lisbon, Quimbra, and Barcelos, and were struck by their robust, decentralised approach. At the University of Lisbon, for example, each of its 18 schools has its own independent student union, fully student-run, yet embedded in governance.

One standout aspect of the Portuguese model is the strong tradition of community between senior students and freshmen. Even without financial incentives, student engagement remains high, thanks in part to a strong cultural sense of belonging. These insights are particularly relevant to our own ongoing challenge of low engagement among Student Reps. I plan to bring these lessons to the "Re-Imagining Representation" working group, where we've already made strides in revising rep training and structure. Some of these international practices might offer us a fresh lens to think about student-led engagement in a UK context.

I also had the chance to talk about these experiences on the **Wonkhe podcast**, which I'd recommend to anyone interested in student representation, engagement models, and cross-cultural perspectives. **The link for the podcast:** https://wonkhe.com/blogs/podcast-portugal-special/

This report marks the culmination of a year of hard work, collaboration, and shared progress. While there's still much to be done, I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved and confident that the foundation we've laid will continue to benefit students at UWE long after this year ends.