




# Sabbatical Officer

## Role Review Recommendations

Autumn 2024



- 
-  Stand Strong
  -  Join Together
  -  Take Responsibility

# Introduction

## What, Why & How?

### What?

This report has been created as part of a review of the Sabbatical Officer roles within SUSU to make recommendations on the future structure of the team. It consolidates the findings of a large student consultation.

### Why?

The current Sabbatical Officer roles were last reviewed and updated in the 2017-19 academic years. A lot has changed in the world since, with a global pandemic, rising living costs, and a student housing crisis.

Student feedback suggests that student priorities and concerns today are not well represented in the current structure created over 6 years ago, and that change is needed to more effectively represent students.

### How?

The consultation began in August 2024 with an exploration of past survey and engagement data in the fresh context of reviewing the roles. This was followed by an extensive student consultation across September, October, and November. In-person surveying and co-creation sessions were used to expand on the survey findings and add greater context.

**Over 4,500 students have been involved in the consultation this term.**

## Methodology



### Engagement Data

All Students (25,000+)



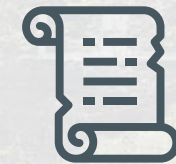
### In-Person Surveys

150+ Students



### Co-Creation

6 Sessions with  
Engaged Students



### Surveys

Freshers 2024  
(1,800+ Responses)

Student Experience  
Survey Autumn 2024  
(3,700+ Responses)

### Past Surveys

Welcome/Freshers Surveys (2020-24)  
Student Experience Surveys (2023-24)  
PGR Experience Surveys (2022-24)  
SUSU Annual Surveys (2020-24)  
Democracy Review Survey (2023)



### Sector Research

24 Other Unions



# Introduction

## Our Approach

### Interest Groups

Four interest groups were considered throughout the consultation to ensure balanced recommendations to avoid the quieter voices being drowned out by more vocal interest groups. Various approaches were used to reach different groups and consult them on the future structure.

### Forming the Team

It quickly became apparent that each interest group would prefer different structures and roles to each other. There was no universally suggested team across all interest groups, and it was not possible to take the most popular role from each interest group to form a hybrid team.

**Instead, we have taken the top priorities from each interest group and ensured that they are represented proportionately.**

This helped create a structure that meets the need of all interest groups, is easy to understand, and more effectively represents everyone.

Over 15 different structures were considered and the one recommended is the one that best met the needs of everyone. It has also received positive feedback when interests were tested with small samples from each interest group.

### Interest Groups



**Former & Current Sabbatical Officers**



**Students Engaged in Representation**

e.g. Course Reps, Officers, Senators, Voters, etc.



**Students Engaged in Community Groups**

e.g. Sport Members, Society Members, Committee Members, Event Attendees, etc.



**Wider Population**

e.g. Everyone Else, Levels of Student, Unengaged Students, etc.

# Team Structure



# Team Structure

## Size, Titles & Names



### Team Size

It is recommended that the Sabbatical Officer team remains as a **team of five**.

#### Why?

Although there was some **vocal desire among current and previous Sabbatical Officers** to reduce the team down to four roles, there did not appear to be a case for this change among other interest groups.

Student Reps strongly felt that it would be **detrimental to student voice** by reducing the team size.

SUSU also currently has **one of the smallest ratios** of Sabbatical Officers to students for the sector. Reducing this further would likely make SUSU the smallest in the country.

Reducing the team size without a clear justification whilst SUSU is not making significant cuts elsewhere would make little sense.



### Team Titles

Continue with the President and Vice President titles for now, and **review in the future**.

#### Why?

Some students questioned **why, if the structure was linear**, some of the roles was still a President and Vice Presidents, and not just five Presidents.

There is a large population of international students at the university. Acronyms do not always translate well for these audiences. In exploration as part of the Leadership Elections 2024, it was found that the term President was **more accessible** to Chinese students and when used and achieved higher engagement.

Presidents and Vice Presidents is the standard model across the Russell Group and currently feeds into the University governance structure.

Refreshing the titles is **does not fundamentally impact the responsibilities** of each role, so this is something that can be explored later.



### Team Names

Update the names of each role to be simple and clear with **one-word names**.

#### Why?

The recommended names have been **simplified** to clear one-word names. This makes the roles easier to promote and clearer to students.

It also **moves away from the 2017-19 restructure** where roles were combined and renamed as a combination of the two titles.

# Team Structure

## Roles

Responsibilities

Shared

Partners

	Union President	VP Education	VP Inclusion	VP Communities	VP Sport
Responsibilities	<p><b>SUSU Overall</b> (Primary SUSU Spokesperson)</p> <p><b>Governance</b> (Highest levels within SUSU and the University)</p> <p><b>Champion Mental Health &amp; Cost of Living High Level Campaigns</b> (These will change as student needs evolve.)</p> <p><b>Democracy</b> (Including within SUSU, the local community and UK)</p>	<p><b>Represent Academic Interests</b> (Including in core meetings and supporting UG, PGT, &amp; PGR Reps)</p> <p><b>Work Life Balance</b> (Advocate for a better academic culture)</p> <p><b>Educational Societies</b> (Represent academic communities)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Academic Interests</b> (Advocate for access to representation)</p>	<p><b>Underrepresented &amp; Liberation Groups</b> (Represent our diverse student population)</p> <p><b>International Students</b> (Advocate for the interests of international students)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Social Experience</b> (Advocate for access to the same opportunities as UK campuses)</p> <p><b>Inclusion Campaigns</b> (Advocate for and celebrate our diverse student population)</p>	<p><b>Societies &amp; Community Groups</b> (Represent student communities)</p> <p><b>Housing/Accommodation</b> (Build communities and represent student needs)</p> <p><b>SUSU Events</b> (Champion student led and student focused events)</p> <p><b>Civic Engagement</b> (Represent students in the local community)</p>	<p><b>Sports Teams</b> (Represent sports clubs, including BUCS and intramural)</p> <p><b>Sport Facilities</b> (Represent sport facility users)</p> <p><b>Active Participation</b> (Encourage being physically active and facilitate opportunities within sport)</p> <p><b>Wellbeing</b> (Encourage healthy lifestyles and champion awareness campaigns)</p>
Shared	<p><b>Mental Health / Welfare / Safety / Campuses / Making Friends / Employability / Transport / Sustainability</b></p>				
Partners	<p>Senate Relevant Officers</p>	<p>Academic Reps Academic Societies</p>	<p>Liberation Officers</p>	<p>Societies &amp; Student Groups Events Committee Society Exec Committee</p>	<p>Sports Teams Sports Exec Committee</p>



# Student Context

# Student Context

## Wider Population

The University of Southampton has a diverse student population, spread across a wide range of subjects and backgrounds.

Undergraduate degrees typically last 3-4 years. These students are more likely to be from the UK and aged between 18-21 years old.

Postgraduate taught degrees typically last 1 year. These students are more likely to be from China and aged between 22-25 old.

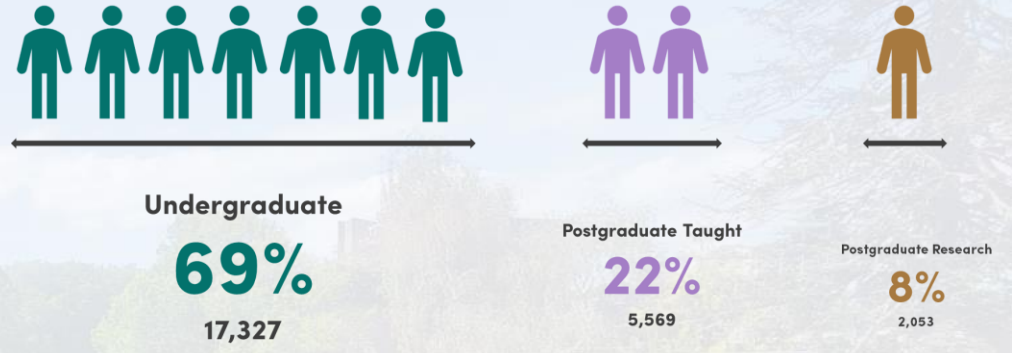
Postgraduate research degree (PhDs) typically last 2-4 years. Around half of these students are from the UK and aged between 25-35.



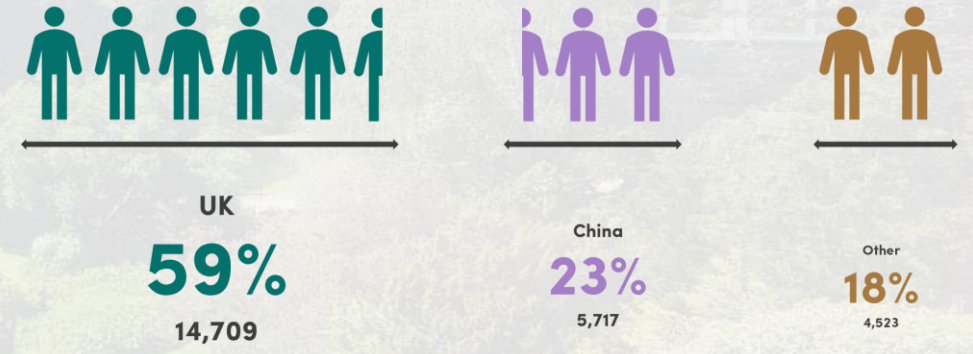
Total Student Population

# 24,949

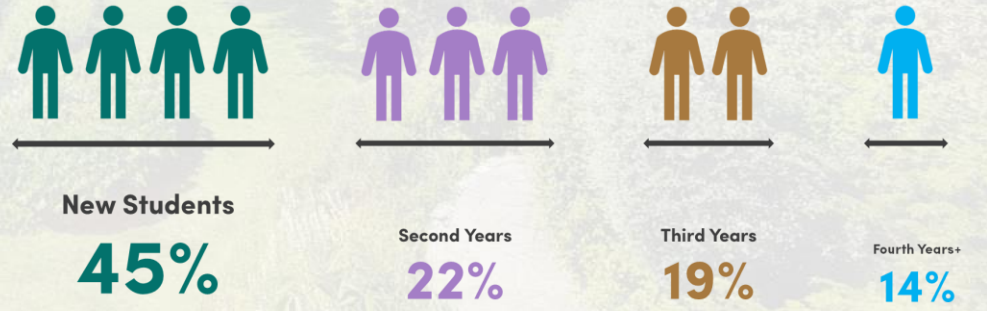
### Study Level



### Nationality



### Study Year





# Student Context

## SUSU Engagement

There are many unique ways students can use SUSU services and take part in our activities. **57% of all students** have taken part in at least one of these activities this year.

Over 4,000 students have helped shape how we support and represent them by **taking part in our surveys**.

Over 1,500 students have been supported across around 4,000 different cases by the **Advice Centre**. In addition to this students also use the SUSU **Food Bank** in the Advice Centre.

From survey data, around 52% of students use the **SUSU Shop** and 18% regularly purchase food from **SUSU outlets**. Over 5,500 students have visited **The Stags** in the evenings, including attending events such as Stag's Karaoke.

SUSU also runs a range of **campaigns for our students**, such as the You Are More Than campaign to support students through the exam period with relaxing activities and giveaways, Southampton Says Enough to improve safety in Southampton, and a range of inclusivity focused campaigns to support our diverse student population.

# 14,248

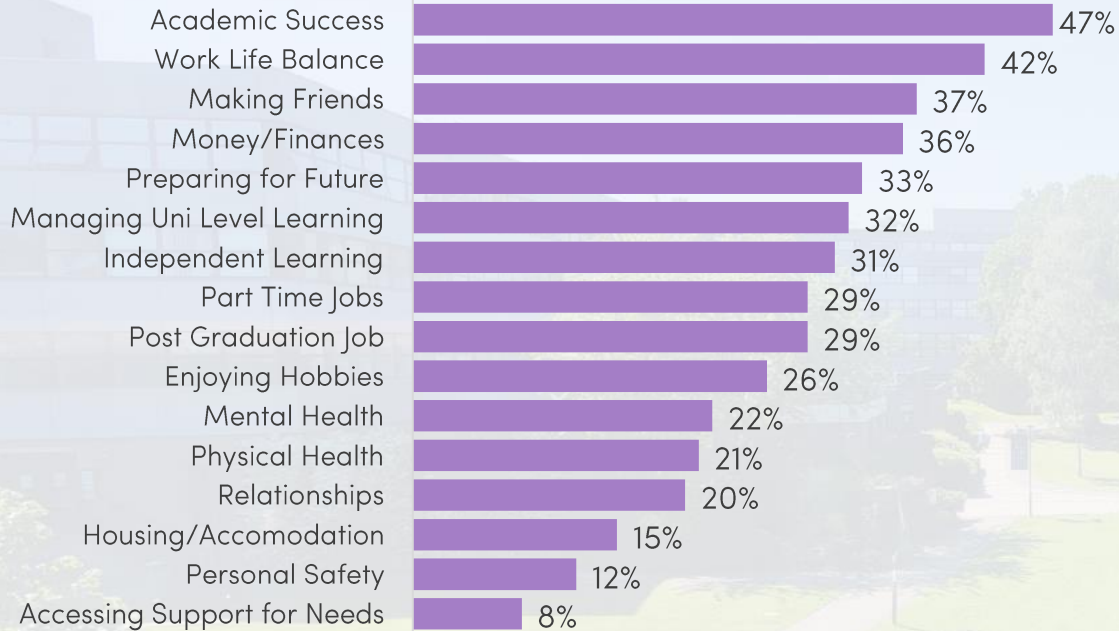
**students have taken part in SUSU activities since September 2024 by either joining a club or society, attending an event, or volunteering as a student leader.**

UG	PGT	PGR
<b>51%</b> Club/Soc Members	<b>14%</b> Club/Soc Members	<b>16%</b> Club/Soc Members
<b>10%</b> Voted in Elections	<b>8%</b> Voted in Elections	<b>3%</b> Voted in Elections
<b>13%</b> Committee Members	<b>1%</b> Committee Members	<b>4%</b> Committee Members
<b>45%</b> Attended Events	<b>33%</b> Attended Events	<b>9%</b> Attended Events

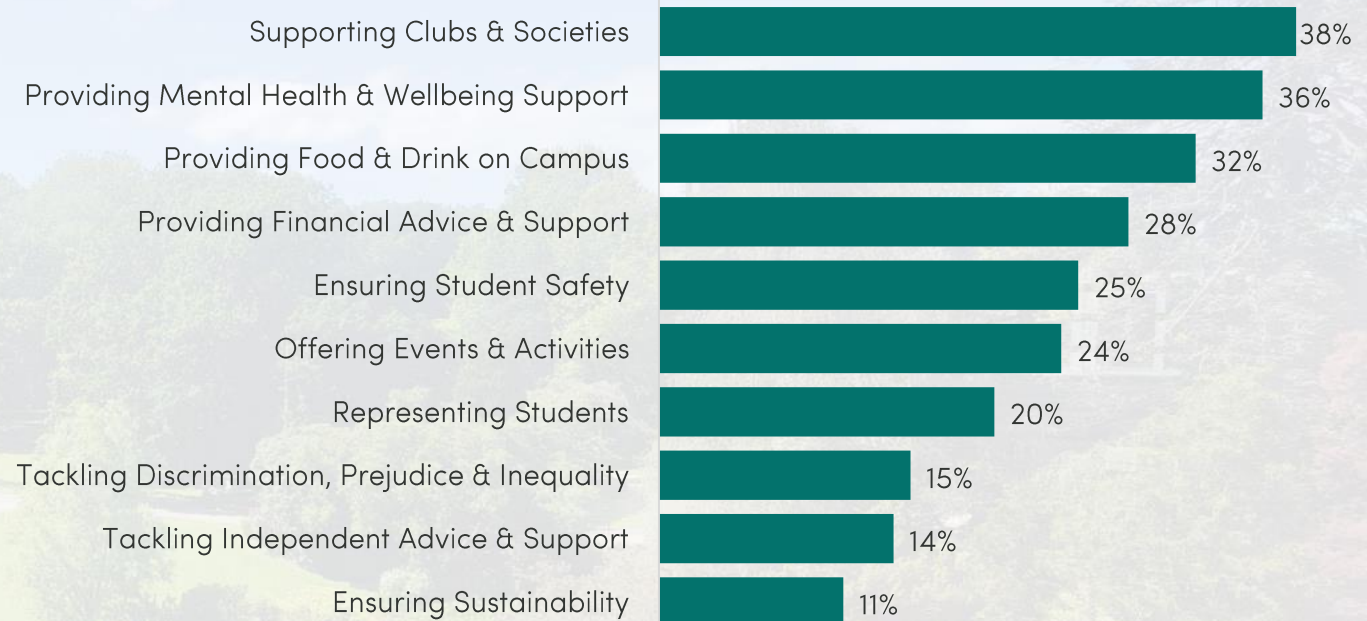
# Student Context

## Priorities & Concerns

### Student Priorities/Concerns After Freshers



### Top 3 Priorities for SUSU: Autumn 2024



#### UG Students

Academic success, work life balance, cost of living, and making friends are the top concerns.



#### PGT Students

Academic success, and employability are the top concerns.



#### PGR Students

Work life balance, academic success, and making friends are the top concerns.



#### International

Academic success, employability, and work life balance are the top concerns.



#### Engaged

Academic success, work life balance, cost of living, and making friends are the top concerns.



#### Unengaged

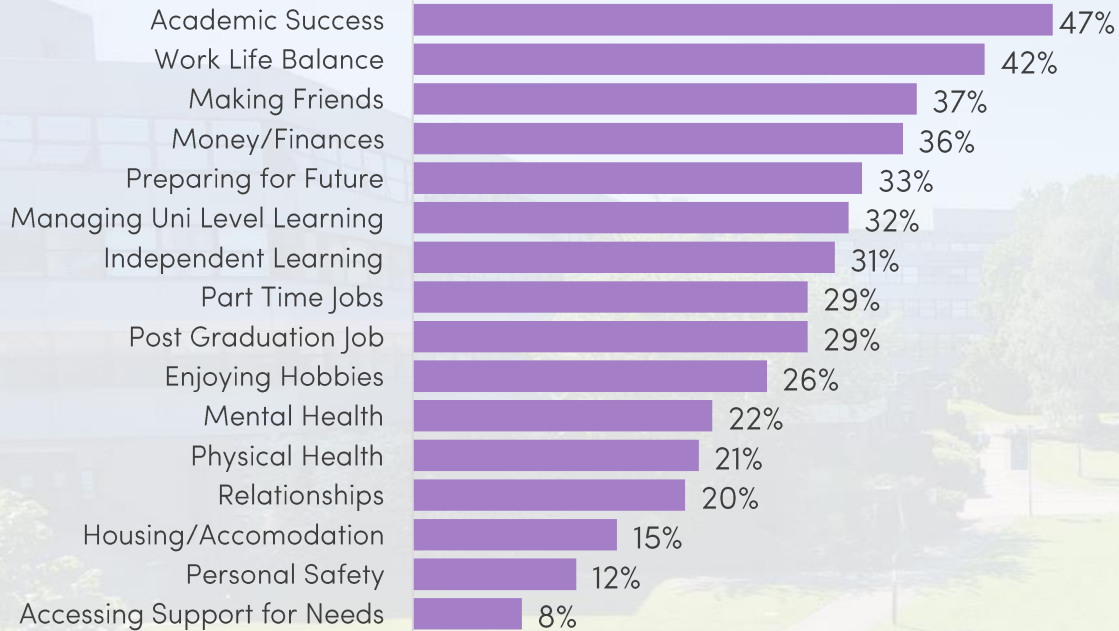
Academic Success, preparing for the future, and work life balance are the top concerns.



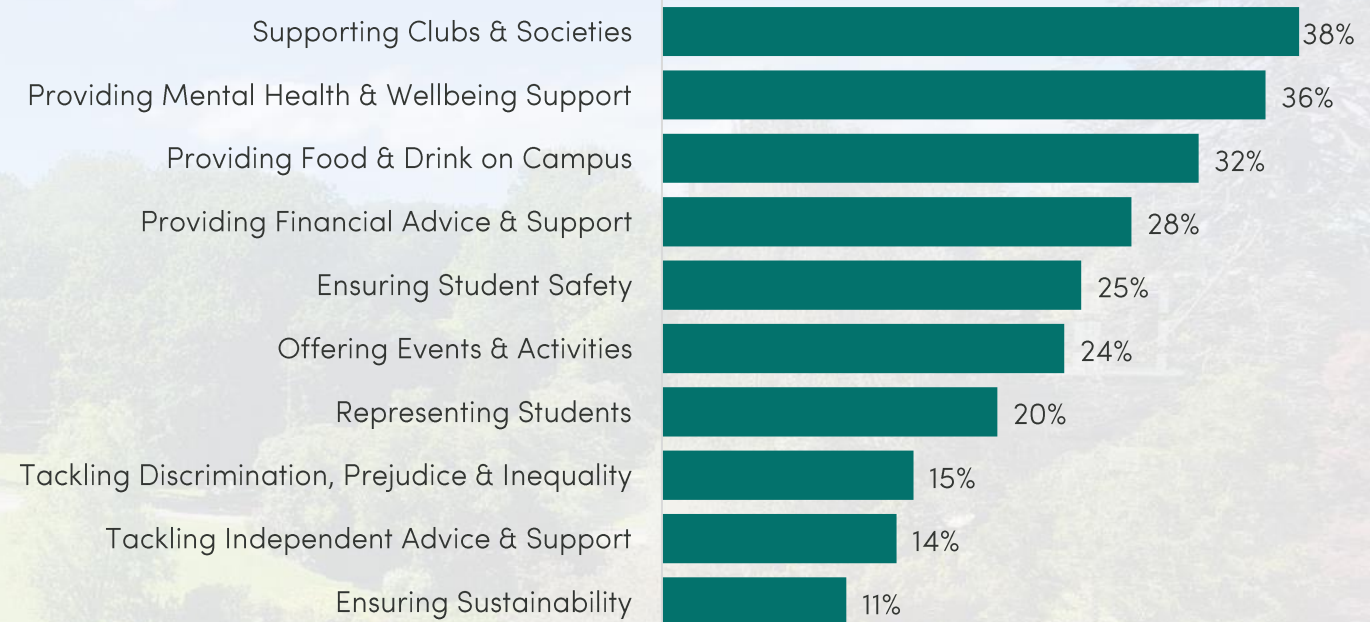
# Student Context

## Priorities & Concerns

### Student Priorities/Concerns After Freshers



### Top 3 Priorities for SUSU: Autumn 2024



#### UG Students

Supporting clubs and societies, and mental health/wellbeing support is the top SUSU priorities.



#### PGT Students

Food/drink, clubs and societies, and providing events are the top SUSU priorities.



#### PGR Students

Mental health/wellbeing support, clubs and societies, and representation is the top SUSU priorities.



#### International

Food/drink, clubs and societies, and providing events are the top SUSU priorities.



#### Engaged

Supporting clubs and societies, mental health/wellbeing, and food/drink are the top SUSU priorities.



#### Unengaged

Mental health/wellbeing, food/drink, and financial advice are the top priorities for SUSU.

# Team Roles



# Team Roles

## Overview

	Union President	VP Education	VP Inclusion	VP Communities	VP Sport
Responsibilities	<p><b>SUSU Overall</b> (Primary SUSU Spokesperson)</p> <p><b>Governance</b> (Highest levels within SUSU and the University)</p> <p><b>Champion Mental Health &amp; Cost of Living High Level Campaigns</b> (These will change as student needs evolve.)</p> <p><b>Democracy</b> (Including within SUSU, the local community and UK)</p>	<p><b>Represent Academic Interests</b> (Including in core meetings and supporting UG, PGT, &amp; PGR Reps)</p> <p><b>Work Life Balance</b> (Advocate for a better academic culture)</p> <p><b>Educational Societies</b> (Represent academic communities)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Academic Interests</b> (Advocate for access to representation)</p>	<p><b>Underrepresented &amp; Liberation Groups</b> (Represent our diverse student population)</p> <p><b>International Students</b> (Advocate for the interests of international students)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Social Experience</b> (Advocate for access to the same opportunities as UK campuses)</p> <p><b>Inclusion Campaigns</b> (Advocate for and celebrate our diverse student population)</p>	<p><b>Societies &amp; Community Groups</b> (Represent student communities)</p> <p><b>Housing/Accommodation</b> (Build communities and represent student needs)</p> <p><b>SUSU Events</b> (Champion student led and student focused events)</p> <p><b>Civic Engagement</b> (Represent students in the local community)</p>	<p><b>Sports Teams</b> (Represent sports clubs, including BUCS and intramural)</p> <p><b>Sport Facilities</b> (Represent sport facility users)</p> <p><b>Active Participation</b> (Encourage being physically active and facilitate opportunities within sport)</p> <p><b>Wellbeing</b> (Encourage healthy lifestyles and champion awareness campaigns)</p>
Shared	<b>Mental Health / Welfare / Safety / Campuses / Making Friends / Employability / Transport / Sustainability</b>				
Partners	Senate Relevant Officers	Academic Reps Academic Societies	Liberation Officers	Societies & Student Groups Events Committee Society Exec Committee	Sports Teams Sports Exec Committee

# The Changes



# The Changes

## What's New?

### Cost of Living

Cost of living has been added to the Union President role as part of SUSU's **high level campaigns**.



#### Growing Concern

Over the past four years, cost of living has become an area of increased concern among students impacting every aspect of their experience. It was not felt that though that this should form its own role by any interest group.

#### Why?



#### Impact

The Student Experience Survey in Spring 2024 found **81% of students** had cut back to manage financially. This had a negative impact on their experience, with 30% saying their **mental health** had suffered.



#### High Level

Given the breadth of impact this has on student experience, it is recommended that representing students on cost of living form a core part of the Union President's responsibilities, as they can lead on **lobbying senior stakeholders** in the university.

### Work Life Balance

**Work life balance** has been added as a core part of the VP Education role.



#### Increased Concern

After the pandemic, work life balance has become an area of increased concern among students and is having a **significant detrimental impact on their wellbeing** and ability to enjoy their time at university.

#### Why?



#### Impact

The Student Experience Surveys have found a clear correlation between work life balance, **worsening mental health**, and a low sense of **community**. The most recent Freshers Survey in October 2024 also found that insufficient time was not the primary reason that 43% of new students who did not take part in Freshers were unable to.



#### Primary Cause

All interest groups felt that this was important to be covered by a role. It has been recommended as a core part of VP Education. Insight suggests **academic experience is one of the primary causes** of poor work life balance, and this role overlaps with timetabling, assessments, workload, etc. There was some link between work life balance and cost of living, particularly among PGR students in our surveys, but this there was a much more substantial link to the educational



# The Changes

## What's Moved?

## Accommodation

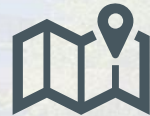
**Accommodation (including halls)** has been moved from Union President to VP Communities.

### Why?



#### Where You Live

Where students live has been demonstrated in the Rate Your Crib Surveys over the past decade to have a significant impact on a students' sense of community. Most students living in their own home, or with family, found it much more difficult to make friends than those in halls or private rented accommodation.



#### Sports & Societies

Sports and societies are the primary part of SUSU's offer that helps build a sense of community. In the Student Experience Survey in Autumn 2023, 54% of students who felt part of a community said joining helped, compared to only 15% of those who did not feel part of a community. It also suggests that students will join groups in their first year and then form the friendships that will determine who they live with in subsequent years.



#### Accessibility

Its recommended this sits with VP Communities with a big focus on community building and ensuring that our offer is accessible to all students regardless of where they live, as this is fundamental to their sense of community.



#### Reflecting Now

SUSU's involvement with university halls has shifted to be around coordinating and supporting society events. Accommodation moving to VP Communities creates greater consistency of responsibilities.



#### Governance

Over the past few years, the responsibilities of VP Education & Democracy around democracy have **evolved to align better with the governance responsibilities** of Union President. To avoid overlap, and to allow VP Education space to focus more on work life balance, democracy has move to Union President.



#### Reflecting Now

In recent years, SUSU's campaigns to encourage participation in local and national democracy (e.g. voter registration) has been led by the Union President. Democracy moving to Union President creates greater consistency of responsibilities.

## Democracy

Democracy has moved from VP Education to Union President with a **greater emphasis on UK Democracy**.

### Why?



# Representing All

# Representing All

## Our Considerations

### Level of Study



#### UG Students

UG students' top priorities for SUSU are represented well across the structure, with a clear focus on sports, societies, education, and cost of living.



#### PGR Students

PGR students have lower engagement with SUSU. Their priorities are represented primarily in the VP Education role. Cost of living and mental health are also big areas of concern for them, that are now more clearly represented by Union President.



#### PGT Students

In the consultation there was a desire among PGT students for greater representation. Some suggested the creation of a new VP Postgraduate role as their experience and interests weren't fully covered in the existing structure. This is something that exists in other unions and was considered, but the role appeared to have significant overlap with the VP Education role due to the overlap in how the academic structures and SSLCs are set up at this university. It was not clear how it could be effectively split to avoid conflicting responsibilities between two roles. Instead of creating a new role, the biggest priority of PGT students (employability) has been embedded across all roles, and the VP Inclusion role has been given greater emphasis on the inclusion of international students, many of whom are PGT students.

### Inclusion



#### International Students

In the consultation international students were not interested in an VP International role as it would be for all nationalities, rather than each one, and they had different needs to other nationalities, that needed better individual representation. There was a feeling they needed representing more clearly within the structure, but not as their own role.



#### Underrepresented Groups

A concern raised by some students with updating the roles was that the voices of underrepresented groups would be lost if combined with other roles. This has been kept separate, as the VP Inclusion role, to ensure that there is always a role focused on ensuring all students have a voice within SUSU and the wider community.

### SUSU Engagement



#### Engaged Students

The most engaged students tend to be committee members of sports and societies, or Student Reps. The structure maintains the link between those in leadership roles, and a relevant Sabbatical Officer role. The VP Sports and VP Communities role now have a greater emphasis on representing students, as in recent years, these seem to have shifted to be more operational and less representative. Other engaged students, such as event attendees and venue customers, have been given a more prominent representation in the responsibilities.



#### Non-Engagement Students

Education, cost of living, work life balance, and mental health were important to the wider population. These areas have been enshrined in Union President and VP Education, ensuring their fundamental priorities are represented. Shifting VP Activities role to VP Communities with a focus on growing communities should also help more non-engaged students to engage more.



# Final Thoughts

# Final Thoughts

## Overview

Responsibilities

Shared

Partners

	Union President	VP Education	VP Inclusion	VP Communities	VP Sport
Responsibilities	<p><b>SUSU Overall</b> (Primary SUSU Spokesperson)</p> <p><b>Governance</b> (Highest levels within SUSU and the University)</p> <p><b>Champion Mental Health &amp; Cost of Living High Level Campaigns</b> (These will change as student needs evolve.)</p> <p><b>Democracy</b> (Including within SUSU, the local community and UK)</p>	<p><b>Represent Academic Interests</b> (Including in core meetings and supporting UG, PGT, &amp; PGR Reps)</p> <p><b>Work Life Balance</b> (Advocate for a better academic culture)</p> <p><b>Educational Societies</b> (Represent academic communities)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Academic Interests</b> (Advocate for access to representation)</p>	<p><b>Underrepresented &amp; Liberation Groups</b> (Represent our diverse student population)</p> <p><b>International Students</b> (Advocate for the interests of international students)</p> <p><b>International Campuses Social Experience</b> (Advocate for access to the same opportunities as UK campuses)</p> <p><b>Inclusion Campaigns</b> (Advocate for and celebrate our diverse student population)</p>	<p><b>Societies &amp; Community Groups</b> (Represent student communities)</p> <p><b>Housing/Accommodation</b> (Build communities and represent student needs)</p> <p><b>SUSU Events</b> (Champion student led and student focused events)</p> <p><b>Civic Engagement</b> (Represent students in the local community)</p>	<p><b>Sports Teams</b> (Represent sports clubs, including BUCS and intramural)</p> <p><b>Sport Facilities</b> (Represent sport facility users)</p> <p><b>Active Participation</b> (Encourage being physically active and facilitate opportunities within sport)</p> <p><b>Wellbeing</b> (Encourage healthy lifestyles and champion awareness campaigns)</p>
Shared	<b>Mental Health / Welfare / Safety / Campuses / Making Friends / Employability / Transport / Sustainability</b>				
Partners	Senate Relevant Officers	Academic Reps Academic Societies	Liberation Officers	Societies & Student Groups Events Committee Society Exec Committee	Sports Teams Sports Exec Committee





# Questions?