



WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4TH 2025

CELTIC CONNECTIONS

WELCOME!



From Representation to Transformation: Student Democracy Reimagined

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From Representation to Transformation: Reimagining Democracy at UWS Students' Union





Why We Did This

“A Democracy Review Rooted in Evidence, Driven by Students”

- These challenges aren't unique to us – it's sector wide
- Student voice structures hasn't changed in decades - but our students have
- As a widening access university, our students juggle work, caring, placements, and study
- Bring our Students' Union closer to students' everyday lives.
- Traditional systems were hard to access and didn't reflect their realities
- We needed to redesign from the ground up: making student voice visible, relevant, and rooted in real student life



Challenges we wanted to address

“The Old System Wasn’t Working For Most Students”

- Low engagement in Student Council
- Complexity of University committee structures
- Officer workload unsustainable
- Under-representation of large cohorts of students, e.g., those in professionally accredited courses (midwifery, nursing, social work etc) and undergraduates
- Some elected officers often have little knowledge of the University or Union, being elected so soon after starting their courses
- Lack of engagement with or awareness of our Student Officer teams among student population
- Cultural barriers to involvement



Data driven decision making

Annual Student Officer Election Turnout (2020–2025):

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	% TURNOUT 2025
AYR	102	198	93	60	94	172	8.70%
DUMFRIES	4	30	12	3	17	5	2.20%
LANARKSHIRE	188	418	381	277	617	420	11.40%
LONDON	91	219	403	530	692	568	15.70%
PAISLEY	1224	896	598	506	1248	1524	25.40%
OTHER	11	36	13	7	15	31	-
LEVEL OF STUDY							
UNDERGRADUATE	1245	1152	583	432	1208	1217	10%
POSTGRADUATE	377	657	874	932	1475	1503	25.90%
TOTAL	1622	1809	1457	1364	2683	2720	15%



Data – Positive Affirmations

Referendum Endorsement

- ✓ Overwhelmingly endorsed in referendum with **1,798** students voting in support of the changes

Election Participation Highlights:

- ✓ Voter turnout increased by 50% since 2021, reaching a record 2,720 votes in 2025.
- ✓ Undergraduate participation increased 181% from 432 to 1217 between 2023 and 2025.
- ✓ Postgraduate participation rose 61% in the same period.

Student Satisfaction (Annual Survey):

- ✓ 73% satisfied with how the Union represents student views to the University.
- ✓ 71% satisfied with how the Union campaigns on student issues.

Student Representatives Satisfaction Rates

- ✓ 92% of trained Reps report increased confidence.
- ✓ 74% believe being a Rep improved their student experience.



Data – Challenges Identified

- Only 39% of students know who their Rep is.
- 65% said they were not encouraged to stand as Reps; this rose to 77% among postgraduates and 84% at the London Campus.
- Students with disabilities report lower satisfaction with representation.
- Student Reps often feel overwhelmed during peak periods of student concern.
- Need for cultural improvements across the Union and University to create more inclusive, welcoming environments for student voice.



Our Process

“We listened, we questioned, and we are building it together.”

A

Thematic Report 2023 – following consultations with students and staff and desktop research

B

Consultations with Student Councils and over 300 students across all campuses, via student forums, online submissions, and feedback tools

C

Comparative analysis of practice across UK and European Students' Unions / Universities

D

Established Democracy Review Working Group

E

Collaboration with key stakeholders within the University

What We Heard from Students

*"I'd like to be involved,
but I don't really
understand what the
Union does."*

A

Clearer, simpler ways to get involved in shaping change

B

Reps and Officers who are visible, approachable, and clearly representing students' interests

C

Spaces to connect with others in their course or campus - not just formal meetings

D

Support to grow confidence and skills in representation roles

E

Our Union listens, acts, and reports back on outcomes

Three Pillars of Our Democracy Review



PARTICIPATION WITH PURPOSE

Not just more students involved
- but students meaningfully
shaping change.



REPRESENTATION THAT REFLECTS

*If students can't see themselves
in the system, it's not working.*



ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CONNECTION

*Representation works best when
it's rooted in students' everyday
lives - their course, their
campus, their peers*

Academic Societies = The Heart of Belonging

Academic societies aren't just social spaces - they're central to how we build community, amplify student voice, and improve the academic experience.

Academic societies at the centre of student engagement and representation. These communities create natural spaces for students to connect - not only with each other, but with their course, their School, and the Union.

Building engagement through academic societies is key to making student voice more effective. They:

- Build communities and foster a genuine sense of belonging within schools and courses
- Make it easier for time-poor students to connect, lead, and be heard
- Represent the student voice and contribute to shaping the student experience
- Improve academic success, retention, and confidence.

UWS MIDWIFERY SOCIETY

THE POWER OF STUDENTS SUPPORTING STUDENTS



WHAT WE DO



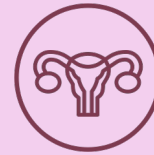
Welcome



Get to know students



Inclusivity



Engaging events



Fundraising

coffee
& cake



2021

XOXO

coffee
& cake



2024

XOXO







Empower students to run events



PREGNANCY AND INFANT LOSS MEMORIAL TREE

Everyone welcome, whether you've been touched by baby loss,
someone you know has, or you want to simply show support. ☺

- ✦ PLACE A MESSAGE ON THE TREE ✦
- ✦ FIND ADVICE + SUPPORT ✦
- ✦ HANDMADE KEEPSAKES ✦
- ✦ INFORMATION ABOUT CHARITIES ✦

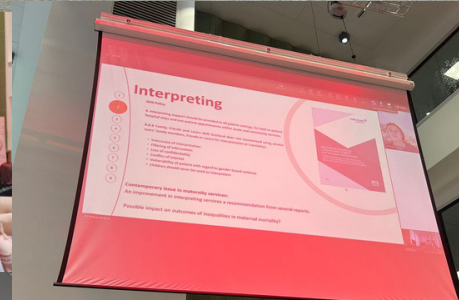
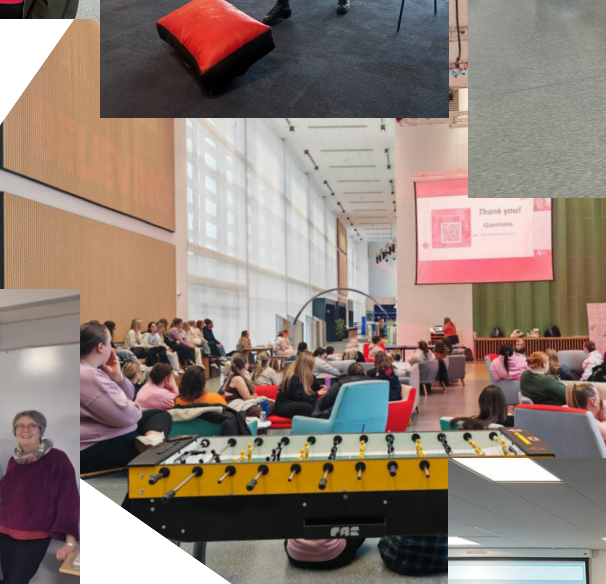
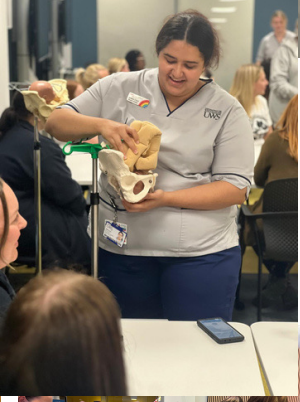
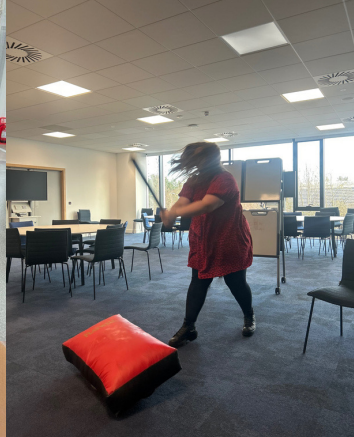
@ THE STREET, UWS LANARKSHIRE


October 9th - 15th





Empower students to run events





UWS Midwifery Society Christmas Fundraiser




About Simba

Simba provide support to bereaved parents through their beautiful hand finished Memory Boxes and Bereavement Rooms.





Following a loss, they offer comfort and support through their 'Trees of Tranquillity' remembrance sculptures and online Support Groups; both offering grieving parents a chance to share experience with others who have been affected.

They are the only Scottish based charity that provide memory making opportunities for parents who have experienced miscarriage as well as stillbirth and have been carrying this out since 2005.

They donate Memory Boxes to individuals at home and to maternity and gynaecology wards, neonatal units, and hospices so that parents can, where possible, create memories of precious time spent together with their babies. Where this is not possible, families have a cherished keepsake to acknowledge and honour their baby's existence.








- Westside tavern** - £50 voucher
- The LOCALE** - £50 voucher
- Greggs** - Vouchers
- Bucks bar** - £40 voucher
- Flip Out** - Vouchers x 2
- Reset Yoga Glasgow** - 3 x classes pass
- McDonald Flooring** - 2x £50 vouchers
- Stephanie Gray hair** - Vouchers x2
- Edinburgh dungeons** - Vouchers
- Camera obscura** - Vouchers
- BBHAIR Collective** - Cut and style
- Hillhead tennis club** -
- 4 x places free group coaching for 6 weeks for ages 4-16
- Champagne Central** - Afternoon Tea
- Cafe source** - £25 voucher towards a meal
- Tappy toes** - Voucher for 4 classes
- Omniplex Cinema** - 2 x Vouchers
- Young Driver** - 30 min Lesson

UWS Midwifery Society Christmas Fundraiser Prize Draw

Total Amount Raised: £1,176

UWS MIDWIFERY SOCIETY

THE POWER OF STUDENTS SUPPORTING STUDENTS



Strengthening Our Democratic Foundations

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PART-TIME VICE PRESIDENTS

Each academic School now has a dedicated part-time VP- making student leadership more accessible and better aligned with students' academic journeys.

Replacing the Student Council, these inclusive assemblies are open to all students within each School. They create a space to share experiences, raise issues, and build community around learning.

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SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES TO REPLACE STUDENT COUNCIL

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CAMPUS AND SOCIETIES FORUMS

Informal, welcoming spaces where students across campuses and societies can connect, collaborate, and shape the Union's direction.

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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Now a broader leadership space - bringing together elected officers, School and Campus voices, liberation reps, and society leaders to coordinate action across the Union.

Candidate Approval Committee

“If I’m voting for someone to represent me, I want to know they’re ready.”

- A student-led panel that reviews candidates for key elected roles
- Ensures candidates have basic experience and strong communication skills
- Open to involved students (e.g. Reps, society members, volunteers)
- Full training for panel members on fairness and bias
- Appeals process led by external Trustees to ensure transparency
- Designed to build trust in elections and improve leadership quality



CONTROVERSIAL

New Officer & Democracy Structure



How Policy Will Be Developed

“We don’t need more motions - we need direction.”

- *Student Council feedback*

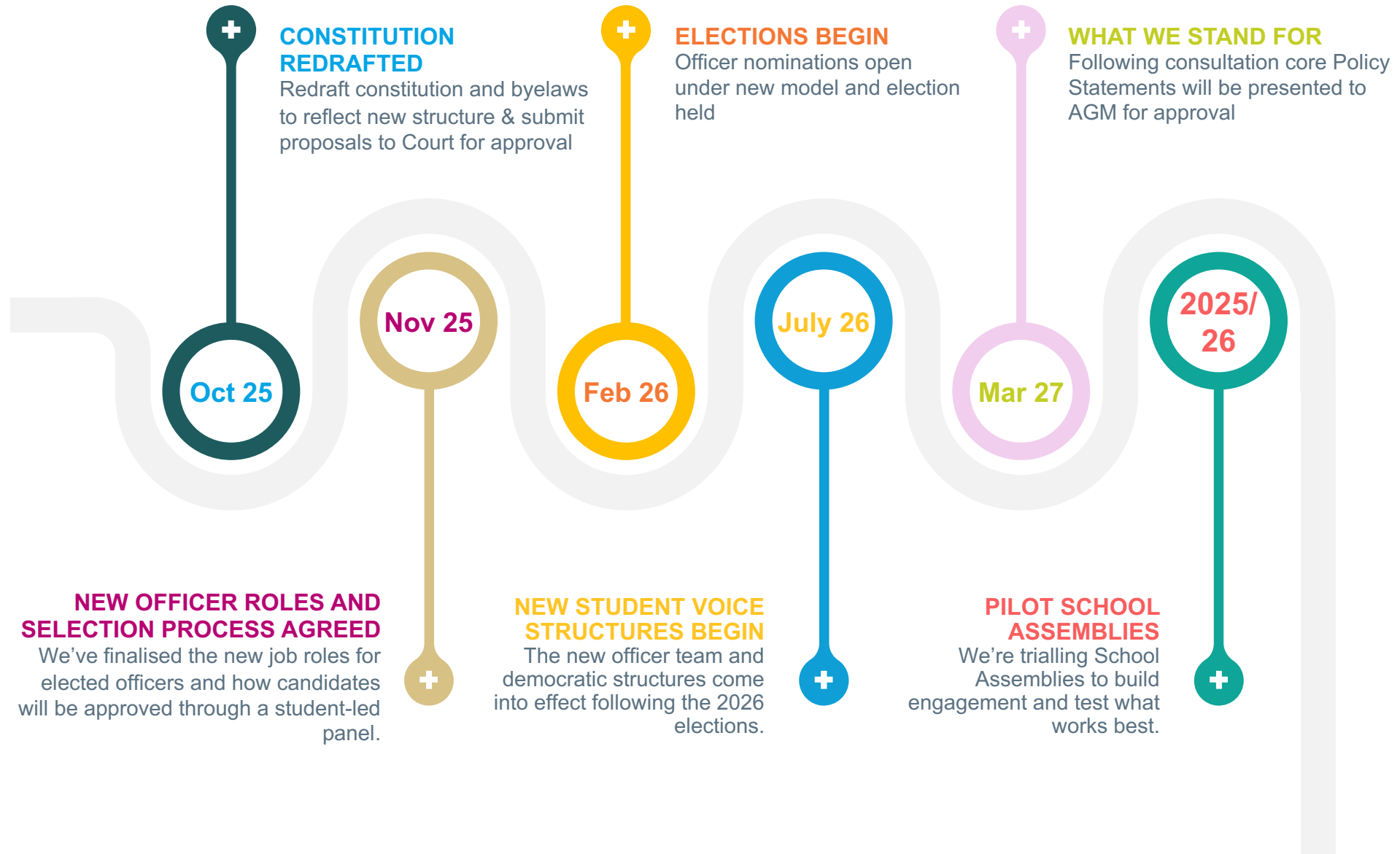
We’re moving from a system where students draft individual policy motions - often inconsistent, outdated or forgotten - to a clearer, more strategic approach:

How it will work:

- We’ll develop **core policy statements** that define *who we are* and *what we stand for* as a Union
- **Working groups or student-led think tanks** will explore policy areas and co-design proposals
- Ideas and issues will be raised through **School Assemblies, Campus and Society Forums, and ‘SUggestions’**
- These will be developed collaboratively - with support from staff and informed by insights from surveys, reps, and campaign data
- Final policies will be reviewed by the **Executive Committee** and presented to the **AGM** for approval



What Happens Next



Addressing Ongoing Concerns and Risk

We've made progress - but we know there's more to work through as we implement the new model.

- ⚠ **Needs Staff Support**
- ⚠ **Workload and Wellbeing for Part-Time Officers**
- ⚠ **Selection Panel Confidence and Clarity**
- ⚠ **Cultural Shift Takes Time**
- ⚠ **University Committee Representation**
- ⚠ **Constitutional Complexity and Timeline**
- ⚠ **Being Prepared to Adapt**



Evaluation and Support for Implementation

We're not just launching a new structure - we're committed to learning from it and improving it.

Resourcing The Change

- To make this work, we invested in a new role - our Senior Student Democracy & Insights Coordinator - who will lead the implementation of the proposals, support the Officer team, track progress and help us improve as we go.

How It Will Be Evaluated:

- A formal review will take place after the first full year of operation (2026/27)
- Evaluation will be shaped by student feedback, officer experiences, and stakeholder consultation

What We'll Measure:

- Voter turnout in elections
- Officer diversity and representation
- Student satisfaction with how their voice is heard
- Engagement by campus, school, and level of study



Key Takeaways

VALUES-LED REFORM

We started with our principles of accessibility, inclusion, and accountability - not just structural change.

EVIDENCE OVER INSTINCT

Student insights, feedback, and sector best practice shaped every stage of the process, not assumptions.

STUDENT-OWNED CHANGE

Pilots, persistence, and meaningful consultation helped ensure reforms were shaped with students, not just for them.

CHANGE TAKES TIME AND RESOURCE

Reform isn't quick or cheap - we invested in new roles, committed to long-term pilots, and created space for learning and adjustment.





Thank You!

