



Cardiff
Students'
Union

Undeb
Myfyrwyr
Caerdydd

Annual Impact Report

2020–21

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The heart of
Cardiff student life



Our strategic cycle

In 2018, Cardiff University Students' Union launched a new three-year strategy, the 2020-21 academic year was due to be the final year reporting against those strategic ambitions.

Our Strategic Vision

Working with every Cardiff student to enhance their University experience.

Our Values

- › Student leadership
- › Inclusion
- › Partnership
- › Diversity

2020-2021 was a year like no other for everyone in society. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted most of the Union's operations. This resulted in staff being placed on furlough or working from home, our in-person engagement activity was paused and our

student services adapted to provide support to students online.

This meant many of the 2018 strategic aims were paused and instead, 2020 became a year of digital innovation and adaptability. The focus of the organisation switched to supporting students with advice and guidance through our Student Advice Team, to helping represent students and combat challenges through the Student Voice Team and remaining engaged and connected digitally with students through our Communications Team.

This Impact Report is a reflection and celebration of the innovation and resilience shown by the organisation throughout one of the most disruptive periods in the organisation's history.



Our purpose

Cardiff University Students' Union advances the education of students at Cardiff University for the public benefit by:

➤ **Promoting the interests and welfare of students at Cardiff University during their course of study and representing, supporting and advising students;**

➤ **Being the recognised representative channel between students and Cardiff University and any other external bodies; and**

➤ **Providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its students.**

Sabbatical Officers



Wins for students

"We lobbied for an upgrade to University HR systems to include access for PGR's and student workers. Now all demonstrators and casual student workers can view payslips and PAYE documents online!"

Jane, VP Postgraduate Students.

"As a result of your feedback the University has created a Safety Net for 2020-21 to protect your academic achievement, which includes uncapped resits!"

Hannah, VP Education.

"We have worked with the Teaching and Assessment Group to extend the Remote Study Policy to the Second Semester. This will enable students to study remotely if they wish to."

Hannah, Seb and Jane, VP Education, VP Heath Park Campus and VP Postgraduate Students.

"Following your feedback, we have worked with University Libraries to increase library slots from two to three hours from January 2021. We have also secured shorter time slots for students who need to access the printing services."

Hannah, Seb and Jane, VP Education, VP Heath Park Campus and VP Postgraduate Students.

"Christmas 2020 looked a bit different with lots of students unable to travel home. To support students, we sent out hundreds of little pick me up boxes to help students stay positive!"

Georgie, Tom, Jane, Seb, Luke, Jude and Hannah - Sabbatical Officer team.

"We have launched a campaign to ensure that students are aware they can change their personal tutor if they don't click."

Hannah, Seb, Georgie and Jane, VP Education, VP Heath Park Campus, VP Welfare and Campaigns and VP Postgraduate Students.

Chief Executive

Despite the obvious challenges in delivering our services in the past year, we were able to continue to provide valuable support to our students and maintain an active role in students' lives. At the beginning of the pandemic we prioritised our Student Advice service, supporting Student Voice and delivering student comms and I'm proud that through the hard work of our Officers and staff we secured notable student wins.

As a highly commercial students' union we were significantly affected by the enforced shutdown of our activities, which can be seen within our engagement figures and financial performance. Unlike the wider University, we made a loss in the year and expect to make further losses in 2020-21 as we aim to re-engage with students and reach pre-pandemic levels of engagement and satisfaction.

Looking ahead, we firmly believe that we will emerge from the pandemic with confidence for the future. In the next year we will mark the opening of the Centre for Student Life, we will launch our new strategy and we will

welcome the biggest undergraduate intake in the University's history. We will embark on this journey in partnership with our students and staff, be tolerant of any hesitancy, prioritise getting things done right before getting things done fast and with the health, safety and welfare of our students and staff as the foundation of our plans.

Daniel Palmer
Chief Executive



Students' Union President

What a year this has been! Students, along with the wider community, have faced immense challenges and changes. The student experience has never been quite like it. Despite this, the student community has risen above the difficult times and have volunteered in the community, worked for the NHS and studied hard.

Digital activity went to the next level. Students' wellbeing was one of our priorities and we secured £50K from HEFCW to support us to run campaigns such as Spring in Your Step, hold wellbeing focused activity and support students with their studies. Throughout the year we saw a record breaking Spring Elections voter turnout, our Speak Week campaign went virtual and the Enriching Student Life Awards recognized the amazing contributions to our community during this time.

As a students' union, we continued to lobby for our students during the pandemic. We have been supporting their wellbeing and academic interests through the introduction of the Safety Net Policy. We will be taking

forward elements of virtual activity that were a success.

I am very proud of the team and wider community for coming together remotely to achieve so much. We have continued to champion the student voice at the heart of campus.

As an organization our staff have been dedicated to supporting students and enhancing their experience throughout the pandemic. Without their support alongside the Elected Officer team we would not have been able to achieve so much.

Hannah Doe

Vice President Education 2020-21
Students' Union President 2021-22



Engagement and satisfaction

Measuring engagement

Our vision is to be the heart of student life, and a key measure in demonstrating how we do this is by providing activities and services that our students use for their benefit. We measure engagement by counting the users of each service whilst striving to increase engagement, particularly in groups where engagement has historically been lower. Leading up to the pandemic, around 73% of all students engaged with us in a given year, and over 90% of students participated in our activities whilst at university.

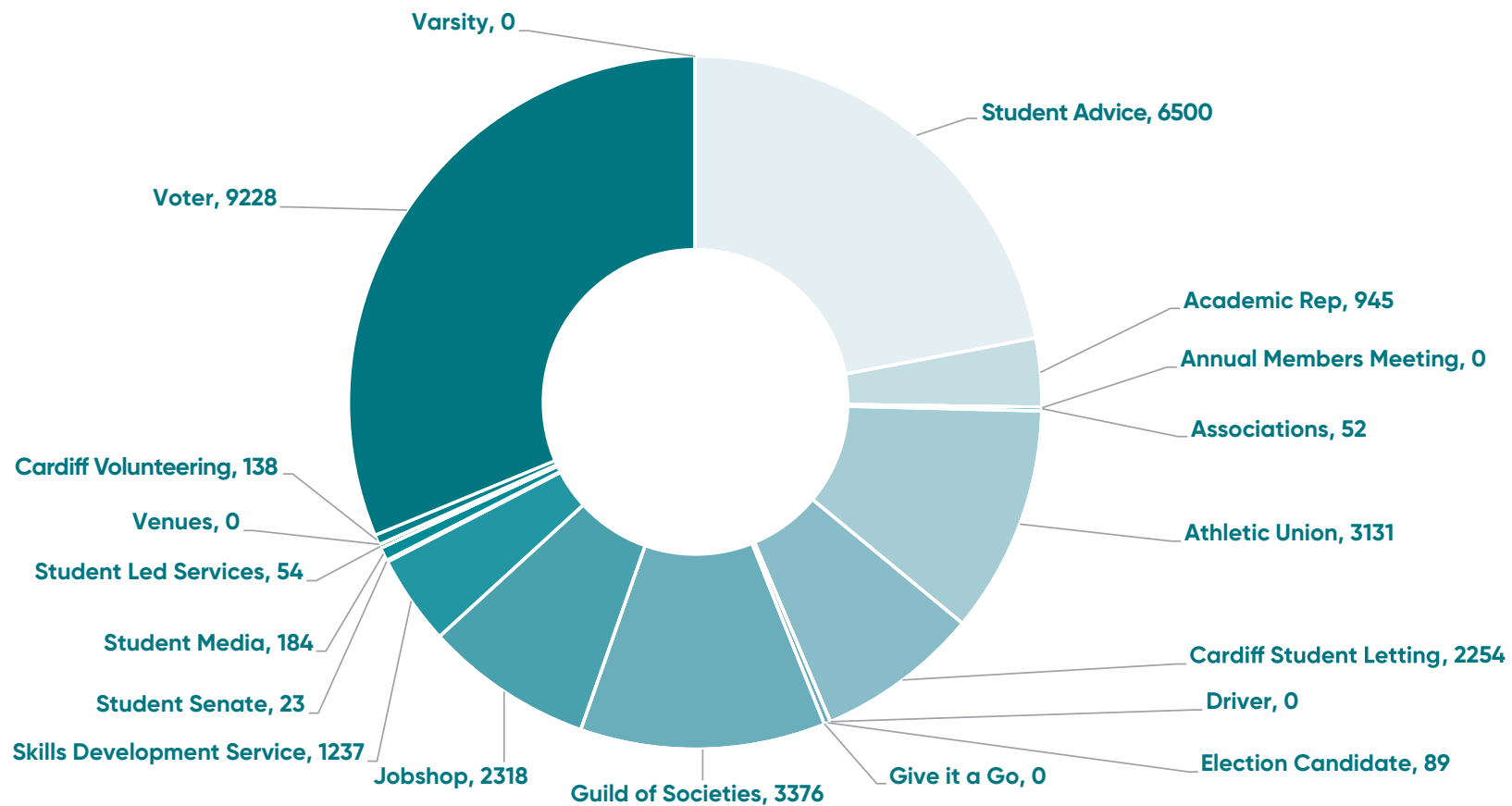
In 2020-21, 17,401 students engaged in our activities, significantly down from the 21,658 who engaged in the prior year but in line with our expectations due to the lack of face-to-face activity. Most areas saw some reduction in engagement with historically high impact areas such as Venues and Welsh Varsity having not operating at all during the year. One standout area for high engagement

was voter turnout in elections, with 9,228 students voting, in what is thought to be the biggest students' union election in the UK for 2020-21. We have prioritised a return to pre-pandemic levels of student engagement in our plans for 2021-22. Although it is difficult to make direct comparisons, we believe that our level of student engagement is amongst the highest in the UK.

Satisfaction

We monitor levels of student satisfaction through both internal and external surveys and use these measures to assess overall performance. Due to the pandemic many external bodies didn't conduct research on student satisfaction so we undertook our own survey that also sought to understand what our students wanted from us during the pandemic. Of the nearly 2,000 students taking part, 78% were satisfied with the Union, with 5% dissatisfied.

Engagement



Our top 10

How we adapted to COVID-19



Survival of student groups

In a year when much of our traditional student group activity was severely impacted by the pandemic, many of our groups had to evolve to deliver virtual activity for the first time, as well as adapting to deliver smaller pockets of face-to-face provision when government guidelines allowed.

Despite the challenges this posed, many groups delivered vital activity and the vast majority of sports teams, societies and volunteering groups were able to ensure they survived and handed their group over to the next generation of leaders for future years.

Student group support and successes included:

- › Providing up-to-date advice and guidance on interpretation of national, local and activity-specific Covid-19 rules.
- › Over 18 clubs, societies and volunteering projects were supported with grants to undertake virtual activity with a focus on improving student wellbeing.

- › Supporting and maintaining groups to prevent them from withering away during periods of inactivity.
- › Refunding students for the cost of their yearly membership to the Athletic Union and Guild of Societies in light of the reduced activity, irrespective of the benefit derived.
- › Over 90 student groups were provided with Covid recovery grants – supporting the groups in most need due to inactivity to rebuild for future activity.

61 of 67 affiliated sports clubs managed to provide some form of face-to-face physical activity for their members. //



- › Our Student Media managed to stay active and have good engagement throughout the year – including winning these external awards:
 - › Student Radio Association Awards 2020
 - › GOLD for Multi-platform for the Eggs Marks The Spot event
 - › Bronze for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion
 - › Bronze for Best Producer – Holly Markham

Prioritising student wellbeing

Student wellbeing was severely impacted by the pandemic, with many students unable to make new friends, socialise or participate in the student experience activities that usually support them in building communities on campus.

Thanks to a £50,000 grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Union was able to deliver bespoke wellbeing campaigns and support student groups to deliver virtual events for their members.

'Put a Spring in Your Step' Campaign

500 mindfulness packs were distributed, included self-help materials and 'grow your own' seeds.

Over £10,000 was paid to student groups to deliver online wellbeing and virtual activity – helping them engage with their members despite the challenges of the pandemic"

300 Get Active packs were provided to help students get active around the city with over 240 engaging on a Strava group.

Wellbeing Packs:

We provided 150 Winter Wellbeing packs to students staying in Cardiff over the Christmas period, a further 100 LGBTQ+ support packs over LGBTQ+ history month and 50 parent and carer support packs.

Mental Health First Aid Training:

Over 70 staff and students have completed a Mental Health First Aid training qualification, providing our staff and student leaders with enhanced skills to support students.

Suicide Prevention Training:

We provided Suicide Prevention Training to 469 students in December – supporting students and student leaders with skills and information to give peer support.



Digital communication innovations

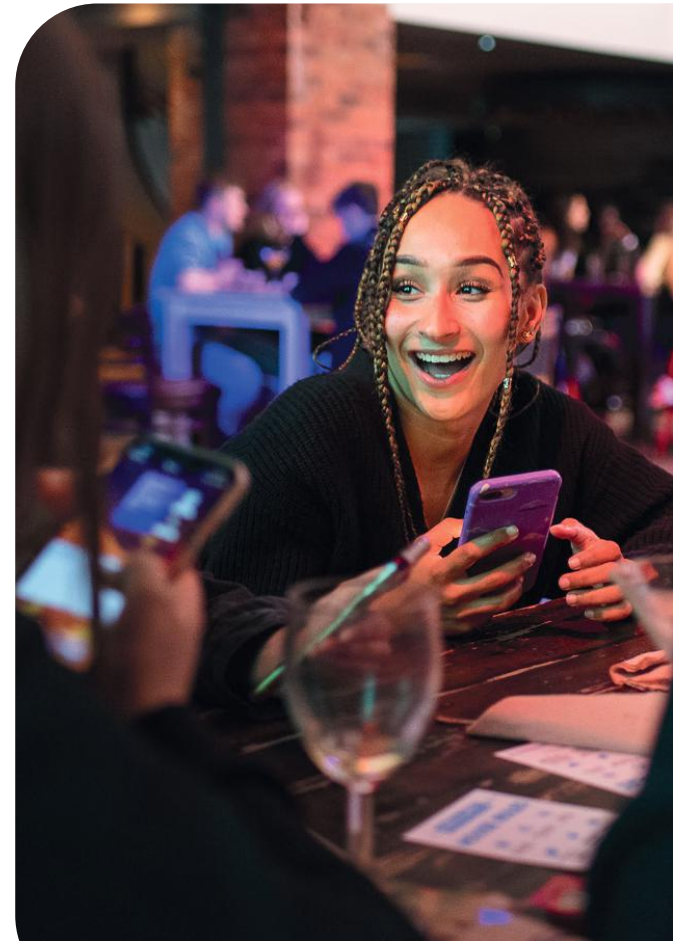
Communication was never more important than throughout the pandemic. Remaining connected and sharing vital messages with students became a key priority.

We pioneered initiatives that helped remote working including use of Microsoft Teams, live broadcasts, podcasts and live Q&As.

We adapted to host and broadcast many of our favourite student events online through OBS software live stream. This meant thousands of students were able to watch events such as the AGM, Spring Election Results, and the Enriching Student Life Awards despite the in-person restrictions.

We worked with the Sabbatical Officer team to launch a new podcast channel, 'Clonc' meaning chat in Welsh, and have gone on to host podcasts from student groups as part of our community building objectives.

We increased email open rates to 40% and hit 10k followers on Instagram. //



Increasing advice support



Student Advice remained open and became a priority service operating throughout the pandemic and continued to offer an expert service remotely. With many students' studies and lives at university and beyond severely impacted by the pandemic, our expert Advice Team were on hand to support students in navigating these challenging times.

Nearly 5,500 advice engagements were recorded, supporting 3,313 unique students.

We saw an increase in pageviews, from 19,143 in 2019-20, to 85,376 in 2020-21 across our Advice webpages last year.



To adapt immediately to meet demand and to ensure that our advice service was accessible we:

- › Rewrote existing webpages and created new where necessary because of COVID-19 (e.g. we created a COVID-19 specific complaint advice page).
- › Made use of live webchat.
- › Advised primarily by email.
- › Offered appointments by phone, Teams/Zoom where necessary.
- › Continued to support students and represent at hearings remotely.



Trading Adaptability

Many of our normal trading activities were significantly impacted throughout the pandemic, with all night club events restricted and limited general trading activity taking place through the entire academic year.

When restrictions permitted, our Venues team adapted to Covid-19 regulations to allow students to meet and socialise again in The Taf and Y Plas. The team rolled out a full table service operation, with students ordering all food and drink to tables via our app.

Off the back of significant demand from students due to the closure of many study spaces on campus and the difficult home working environments many students faced, our Venues team and Customer Service team pivoted our daytime trading operations to become a Study Caffi.

Over the first six weeks, nearly 2,000 students utilised the space to study in a Covid-19 safe manner and were able to order food and drink to their study table from our app. This included remaining open throughout the

Christmas period when many of the campus facilities were closed.

Safety measures were frequently adapted to meet and exceed regulations to ensure we could be open wherever it was safe and possible to do so.

Over 3,600 table bookings were made for our events throughout the year. This resulted in more than 50,000 orders placed by nearly 16,000 users through our CUSU app – delivering food and drink straight to the tables for students in our venues. //



Commercial digital development

Adaptability was a recurring theme across our other commercial venues.

Our merchandise store, Love Cardiff, was able to develop a hybrid in-store and online operating model to adapt to non-essential retail regulations.

Online sales topped in-store sales for the first time in Love Cardiff history, with a 52% increase in sales through the online store compared to the previous year. //

A new personalised "Class of 21" clothing range was introduced for the first time, allowing students to purchase hoodies which featured their names and those of fellow classmates. This helped Love Cardiff increase graduation sales by 150%, despite no in-person ceremonies taking place.

Our letting agency, Cardiff Student Letting, adapted to provide virtual student tours of all properties when the pandemic paused in-person viewings. This meant students were able to complete their entire new property journey online – from virtual viewings over Zoom, to a new digital contract signing process – many of these digital improvements will be kept, increasing the ease of student house-hunting in the future.

Overall Cardiff Student Letting increased the number of properties let by 50 – meaning our not-for-profit letting agency is helping more students find homes than ever before. //

Elections turnout



Student democracy is a core pillar of the Students' Union and this year we were able to engage more students with our democratic process than ever before!

The pandemic had a significant impact on our Spring Elections, with many of the core in-person activities such as ballot stations on campus, unable to take place.

Utilising those savings made, the Union was able to offer students a voucher for engaging and voting in the election. Over 9,000 students voted in the Spring Elections and it was the highest election turnout across all students' unions in the UK.

The stats:

52 candidates for 17 positions

(vs. 55 candidates for 17 positions in 2019-20)

9,111 individual voters

(vs. 5,562 in 2019-20)

141,790 total number of votes

(vs. 46,235 in 2019-20)

Student services go digital

Adapting quickly to a changing world was important for our student services, resulting in reimagining systems, processes and methods of delivering our services to students who were no longer present on campus.

Many of these innovations have continued after restrictions eased giving students more choice and increasing accessibility to help them get involved.

Digital Training Platform for Student Groups

Over 5,000 student leaders were able to receive vital information and training through our newly developed training platform – this development will be utilised in future years, making training more accessible for our leaders.

Jobshop Digital Registration

Our Jobshop adapted to offer a completely remote service during the pandemic. New recruitment software was introduced, supporting students to register, apply for placements and complete timesheets all online. This has saved lots of emails going out to students each day!

Skills Development Online Courses

Over 1,200 students were able to attend online training courses through the Skills Development Service, these ranged from

diplomas, CPD courses, and Leadership and Management accreditations.

Heath Park Virtual Events

Over 20 virtual events were held on Instagram to promote the work of Heath Park student groups, resulting in over 2,000 students engaging and watching content.

Developing our spaces

In a year when our building had seen extraordinarily little usage across the traditional services and activities that would normally be full to the brim with students, we were able to utilise the time (when Covid-19 regulations permitted) to refurbish and develop several spaces.

Developments included:

Third Floor Lounge

Refurbishment of the 3rd floor lounge space and meeting rooms, vastly increasing bookable space for student groups to utilise for their activities

Great Hall Balconies

The Great Hall balconies were redeveloped, increasing the accessibility of our famous gig venue.



Supporting our staff

Supporting our staff to navigate the challenges of working throughout the pandemic was a core theme throughout the year.

Cardiff Students' Union gained a 1* award in the Best Companies Awards, which celebrates workplace engagement – achieving the 'Very Good company to work for' status. //

How we have supported staff:

- › Ensuring relevant staff had equipment and a suitable home working set up.
- › A comprehensive furlough plan and support package for career and student staff, resulting in being able to retain all career staff despite a significant drop in income for the organisation.
- › Launch of a new staff newsletter and Live Q&As to keep staff informed and connected throughout remote and furlough working.

New innovations

- › The CEO has led a development group to review Diversity, Inclusion and Equality policies, which is open to all within the organisation and an example of how the senior management team (SMT) promotes core values.

75% of staff would recommend Cardiff Students' Union as a good place to work.



Finances



Income and Expenditure

Loss for the year

The Union made a loss during the year, due to a massive reduction in overall income caused by the pandemic. Turnover within the group fell from £10,280,850 in 2019-20 to £5,967,126 resulting in a net deficit of £32,323 with group reserves falling to £1,205,522 from £1,342,303 in 2019-20.

The majority of the Union's non-grant income comes from late night entertainment in either night club events or live music shows and neither were possible in the year. However, the other forms of significant commercial income – student lettings and leasing of space in the Union building – weren't significantly affected and generated income in line with our expectations.

Outlook for 2021-22

We have prioritised the rebuilding of our activities and services to students over the next year but expect that our income won't rebound immediately. We expect that in the year overall income won't return to pre-



pandemic levels immediately and consider that the re-introduction of some social distancing measures is likely.

Income for development

During the year we undertook phase 1 of the redevelopment of the former Graduate Centre space on the third floor of the building. The seven new student bookable rooms and additional toilets were completed in September 2020 with phase 2 works taking place in the summer of 2021 to increase and improve our social learning spaces.

Student lettings and leasing of space in the Union building weren't significantly affected //

Balance Sheet

Balance sheet movements

The deficit in the year has slightly weakened the balance sheet position and the impact of the pandemic can be seen in areas such as the reduction in stock holding by the group. However, unlike prior years there haven't been any significant non-cash movements to the balance sheet in the year. The Union's pension liabilities were not re-evaluated in the year and no significant changes were made to the Union's building, which makes up most of the tangible assets. Changes to these two items in prior years can appear to have a dramatic impact on the balance sheet but are not reflective of performance.

Reserves

The Trustees annually review the Union's reserves position and set targets based on the organisation's circumstances. The Union holds a long-term ambition of generating surpluses until £1.3m of free reserves is generated. This goal was briefly achieved in the summer of 2020 but has

been unachieved over the past year and is expected to deteriorate further due to the expected budget deficit in 2021-22. The Trustees have identified a return to surpluses and accumulation of reserves as a priority as our student engagement and commercial activities recover to pre-pandemic levels. The group's funds in free reserves stood at £1,284,592 (2019-20: £1,342,303).

Trustees have identified a return to surpluses and accumulation of reserves as a priority



Trustees

Sabbatical Trustees

Students' Union President: Hannah Doe
(from 1st July 2021)

Students' Union President: Tomos Evans
(to 1st July 2021)

VP Societies and Volunteering: Chris Grieve
(from 1st July 2021)

VP Societies and Volunteering: Luke Evans
(to 1st July 2021)

VP Sports and AU President: Meg Somerville
(from 1st July 2021)

VP Sports and AU President: Jude Pickett
(to 1st July 2021)

VP Education: Gina Dunn
(from 1st July 2021)

VP Education: Hannah Doe
(to 1st July 2021)

VP Heath Park Campus: Sebastian Ripley

VP Postgraduate Students: Orla Tarn
(from 1st July 2021)

VP Postgraduate Students: Jane Chukwu
(to 1st July 2021)

VP Welfare and Campaigns:
Charlotte Towlson
(from 1st July 2021)

VP Welfare and Campaigns: Georgie East
(to 1st July 2021)

Student Trustees

Tariq Awan (from 1st July 2021)

Matthew Bird (from 1st July 2021)

Thomas Mahony-Kelross (to 1st July 2021)

Stephen Oldfield

Ryan Singh (to 1st July 2021)

University Nominated Trustees

Jayne Sadgrove

Ray Singh CBE

External Trustees

Natasha Applasamy

Richard Roberts

Bethan Walsh (to 7th July 2021)

Registered office

Park Place, Cardiff, Wales. CF10 3QN

Registered Company Number: 07328777

Registered Charity Number: 1137163

Senior Staff

Chief Executive: Daniel Palmer

Deputy Chief Executive: Ben Eagle

Director of Finance: Christine Akers

Director of Communications: Raechel Matthey

Director of Engagement and Participation:
Steve Wilford



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