

Statement from The Students' Union President 2023-2024

“As we stand on the precipice of a pivotal year for democracy, with the Local, Mayoral, and General elections looming, it is imperative that we, as a nation, recognise the pressing issues facing our students. As President I have seen first-hand that issues facing students and I am a strong advocate for the rights and well-being of our student population.

Our Students' Union wants to create a new deal for students, one that places their welfare at the forefront of our national agenda. We cannot afford to ignore the pleas of students, whose mental, physical, and financial well-being have been neglected for far too long.

It is time for change—a re-evaluation of our priorities as a nation. Our students deserve better. They deserve access to quality education without the crushing burden of finance. They deserve support for their mental health, ensuring they can thrive both academically and personally. They deserve a future where financial stability is not a distant dream but a tangible reality.

As we approach these elections, let's remember the power of student voice. Let's hold our politicians accountable, demanding policies that uplift and empower our students. Together, let us forge a path forward—a path that champions the rights and dignity of every student in the UK.

This term marks the hard work of the Union but also has provided a unique opportunity to influence national and local politics whilst continuing to offer outstanding services for students, providing a whole host of 'enrichment' opportunities that enhance the experience of students, that will be mentioned in this report.

In Solidarity,

Jack Stokes, President of Dudley College Students' Union”



This report will highlight key areas of work under the DSU core themes and values which are:

Representation- we want students to get the most out of their student experience, DSU represents students, advocates, and campaigns on their behalf.

Skills development- we provide volunteering and training opportunities to prepare students for life and work.

Creating community- by offering activities, events, clubs and social groups we support students to get the most from their social life, meet new people and make new friends.

Representation- including campaigning, lobbying and liberation work.

“My Present, Our Future: A Manifesto for our Future”

The culmination of months of dedicated effort by **student leaders nationwide** has resulted in the publication of the **National Student Manifesto**. Beginning



with the Big Conversation on Education where students discussed the issues they are facing and what the solutions could be to the Manifesto Summit in London last December, where representatives converged to **shape our collective vision**, the journey extended to extensive student research through platforms like the NUS What Students Think webpage. Here, Dudley Students'

Union (DSU) took a proactive step by **launching their own webpage** to delve into the specific needs and aspirations of Dudley students.

DSU has emerged as a **prominent voice for Further Education (FE)** throughout this campaign, playing a central role in **shaping FE policies** within the Manifesto. So pivotal has DSU's President Jack Stokes was honoured with an invitation to **speak on behalf of college students in Westminster** (link to video here: [My Present, Our Future Campaign Speech](#)).

His impassioned address, part of the **My Present, Our Future Campaign**, highlighted crucial issues such as lowering the voting age to 16, ensuring fully funded and autonomous Students' Unions in all colleges, and advocating for an education system tailored to students amidst a backdrop of turbulent reforms.



For a comprehensive overview of the National Student Manifesto, click on the link provided: [National Student Manifesto](#)

“AOC Colleges Week: Influencing for a better education system”.



In recognition of Colleges Week, our efforts extended beyond rhetoric to tangible action. In response to Jack's impassioned speech in Parliament, which got attention from the Association of Colleges (AOC), we were asked to create a video that aligned with this year's theme of **"influencing, engaging, and celebrating."** Recognising the power of student voices in shaping policies, the AOC urged students to adopt a more politically engaged stance, articulating their **desires and needs from the upcoming government.**

Embracing this opportunity, we crafted a compelling video that not only encapsulated Jack's stirring message but also **echoed the sentiments of countless students nationwide.** Our aim was to inspire, to ignite a spark of activism within each viewer, and to start a **collective call for change** within education policy.

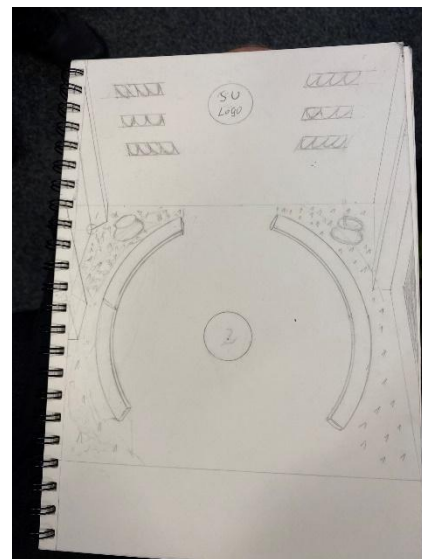
This video, **meticulously created and passionately delivered**, was part of the AOC's "**Pass the Baton Relay**". Through this relay, we not only celebrated the achievements of the past but also laid the groundwork for a future where students are empowered to **shape their futures and forge a brighter tomorrow**.

To experience the impact of our collective voice and vision, we invite you to watch the video here: [AOC Colleges Week](#)

“Zen Den Project: Creating a fresh start for old spaces”.

The Zen Den project, an **initiative aimed at revitalising an underutilised garden space behind the library**, continues to progress smoothly, remaining steadfast on its scheduled timeline.

We have worked with students particularly **Faysal Mohamed to put a unique, practical and inspiring design together**. The aim of the Zen den is to provide a space for students to de-stress away from the pressures of assignments and revising, to **help the mental health** of students and allow people to connect with nature in a safe environment.



Moreover, our proactive approach has seen us **engaging in extensive dialogue with various contractors**, diligently soliciting quotes to ensure that the envisioned transformation remains within budgetary constraints without compromising on quality. These talks have been marked by meticulous attention to detail, as we strive to select the most suitable partners who **share our commitment to excellence**. With determination, we have set our sights on completing the renovation of this space by the end of the academic year, ready for the incoming cohort of students in September.

“NUS VPFE: A new vision for FE”

Jack is throwing his hat into the ring of **national elections**, gunning to become the **next Vice President of Further Education** for the National Union of Students (NUS)! This isn't just a run-of-the-mill candidacy – it's a bold declaration of intent to champion the rights and aspirations of every college student and apprentice across the nation.



Jack with Amira Campbell UoB SU
President and NUS Presidential Candidate.

Jack will be rallying tirelessly on the national stage, **advocating fiercely for the issues that matter most to students.** From battling for better funding to amplifying the voices of the underrepresented, he's gearing up to spearhead a **dynamic movement that reshapes the landscape of Further Education.** The campaign trail is heating up as the countdown to voting week, from the 8th to the 11th of April, begins.

Notably, Jack's candidacy underscores **Dudley SU's formidable presence on the national stage.** With a proud legacy of engaging in the highest forms of national politics, Dudley SU continues to make waves, with Jack **following in the footsteps of two esteemed predecessors.** Their legacy is a testament to the strength and resilience of Dudley SU, a powerhouse in the realm of student advocacy.

For more on Jack's campaign, check out his dedicated webpage: [Jack4VPFFE | dudleysu](https://www.jack4vpffe.dudleysu.com) It's time to make history – are you ready?

“DSU Strategic Plan: Clear direction, a great future”

Just as Dudley College sets its course with a strategic plan, Dudley Students' Union (DSU) has put together a plan for the next three years, moving towards a vibrant and inclusive student community. **Our strategic plan articulates four key priorities,** each designed to propel the Union to new heights of excellence:

Engagement and Participation: We are committed to fostering a culture of active involvement and inclusivity, where every student's voice is not only heard but celebrated. By enhancing democratic engagement and diversifying SU activities, we aim to ignite a spirit of enthusiasm across the student body.

Representation: Upholding the principles of equality and fairness, we pledge to advocate tirelessly on behalf of Dudley College students, amplifying their concerns and aspirations on the issues that matter most to them. Our goal is to ensure that every student possesses a strong voice and enjoys equal opportunities within our community.

Sustainable Growth and Expansion: We want to expand in line with college expansion, we are committed to the growth of the Students' Union, thereby broadening the horizons of opportunities available to students. By focusing on enhancing the student experience and offering improved services, we seek to create a dynamic environment conducive to personal and academic growth.

Community, Support, and Environment: Central to our mission is the cultivation of a diverse and inclusive community, where every student feels a sense of belonging and support. We are dedicated to fostering a sustainable environment that not only nurtures academic success but also promotes personal well-being and social inclusion.

This strategic plan represents a **bold new vision for the Union**, underpinned by innovative ideas and a steadfast commitment to student welfare. However, its **success hinges upon the continued and increased support from Dudley College and the Corporation**. We invite you to join us in this journey of growth and development, as we strive to realise our collective vision of a vibrant and inclusive student community. Together, we can **shape a brighter future for Dudley Students' Union and its members**.

“Israel- Palestine Conflict: Supporting our student body”.

The **current Humanitarian Crisis in Israel and Gaza has been a huge topic for divided conversation within the student movement**. As a Students' Union we stand strong in our belief that no one should live in fear, and we stand by all those affected by this conflict directly or indirectly. We join the collective call for an immediate cease of bloodshed, adherence to international law, and a concerted effort by those in power to facilitate peace.

Given the complex nature of the conflict, diverse perspectives exist on its causes and implications. However, it is crucial for us all to **recognise that real people, including members of our college community, are directly impacted by these events**. In these trying times, we emphasise the importance of treating each other with kindness and mutual respect within our campuses, which must remain a safe space for all.

Regrettably, we are aware of the **national rise in hate crimes, including antisemitism and Islamophobia**. Dudley Students' Union unequivocally condemns bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence in any form, whether in-person or online. We stand firm in our commitment to supporting any student affected by such behaviours.

DSU remains on alert and understands the safety of our students is of paramount importance, which is why we have been in talks with the Community Safety Officer for Dudley Council about how we **reduce risks and protect our community**, we have also liaised with senior management on this issue and raised the concerns of students and looked at how we as a college can support students through this difficult time.

Racism, including Antisemitism and Islamophobia, has **no place in our diverse and inclusive community**. Dudley Students' Union remains a steadfast source of support for all students, and we encourage anyone in need to reach out to us for assistance.

Skills Development – Including training opportunities, professional development, and volunteering.

“Lessons from Auschwitz: Witness to the atrocities of the past”

The SU remains committed to supporting the **‘Lessons from Auschwitz Project’**, organised by the **Holocaust Education Trust**. Two students from photography, **Tobi and Alex** have been chosen to attend as our ambassadors this year, they will be accompanied by **SU staff member Aldrich Gonsalves** and previous **ambassador Cassidy Woodrow**. During the project they can learn about the Holocaust and consider its relevance in today’s world.

Alex and Tobi will delve into the **history of the Holocaust** and the project includes a one-day visit to Poland which is taking place towards the end of March. The visits, combined with orientation and follow-up seminars, **leave an unforgettable emotional and educational mark on participants**.

Students **enhance their skills and demonstrate leadership** by sharing the legacy of the Holocaust beyond the classroom. They become witnesses to history, **committed to ensuring that the stories of survivors are remembered and shared**.

“The John Muir Award: Nurturing Sustainability Champions”

We proudly introduce the **John Muir Award**, a sustainability initiative recently launched as a new project group students can join led by our **Assistant President of Sustainability Ross Pennington-Greatbatch**. The award will serve as a framework for students actively engage in sustainability efforts, providing a structured pathway toward recognition and achievement.

So far, the group have planned out a project made steps to **Cultivating Eco-**

Friendly Habits and Micro Challenges. Our John Muir Award project centres on practical steps that empower every individual to contribute to sustainability. From simple daily habits like reducing plastic waste to engaging in micro challenges (such as lunchtime litter picks), we aim to create a **ripple effect of positive environmental impact** across the college community.

By participating in the John Muir Award, students not only enhance their own eco-consciousness but also contribute to a collective movement toward a greener, **more resilient future and achieve an award in the process!**

Creating community- supporting students to meet likeminded people, try new things and tackle loneliness and isolation.

“Tackling poor mental health: continued support for our students”.



Our Union remains steadfast in our **dedication to supporting students through the ongoing mental health crisis.** Recognising the heightened challenges that arise, especially during critical periods like the holiday season, we took proactive measures to address this pressing issue head-on.

Before Christmas, **we organised the Festive Cheer-up event at Inspired,** understanding that the holiday period can amplify feelings of isolation and despair, potentially exacerbating the risk of mental health issues, **including**

suicide. With the added strain of the cost-of-living crisis, we recognised the urgent need to provide support to our student community.

Following the holidays, we continued our efforts with the **Feel-Good Monday event,** designed to uplift spirits and promote well-being as students returned to their studies. At both events, we went above and beyond to create a nurturing and supportive atmosphere. We offered **free hot chocolate, a comforting and familiar treat, as well as engaging activities like crafting stress balls out of balloons and flour.** Most importantly, we fostered open and honest conversations about mental health, providing a safe space for students to share their experiences and seek support.

Through these initiatives, we sought not only to alleviate immediate distress but also to foster a **culture of compassion and understanding surrounding**

mental health within our student community. Our commitment to supporting students through their mental health journeys remains unwavering, and we will continue to explore innovative ways to provide support, and advocacy for all.

Afro Club: Celebrating African Culture and Heritage”



A vibrant student club, **the Afro Club**, has been established this academic year. **Dedicated to celebrating African culture and heritage**, the club convenes weekly, fostering a sense of community and cultural pride. **Led by students Favour Matthews and Jocelyn**, the Afro Club engages in a variety of enriching activities. Notable

highlights include a **spirited Jollof rice cook-off**, creative hair styling sessions, and cozy gatherings to watch Nigerian soap operas. The club has already attracted **over 20 enthusiastic students**, all eager to explore and honour the richness of African traditions.

“Kickin’ Stigma Men’s Mental Health Football Club: Thriving and Ambitious”

In the heart of our educational community, **the Kickin’ Stigma Men’s Mental Health Football Club** has blossomed into a vibrant force this academic year. With an impressive **roster of over 30 dedicated players**, the club convenes weekly, providing a haven for students to release stress and find clarity. Many



participants attest that the club serves as a **vital outlet, allowing them to let off steam and clear their minds amidst the rigors of academic life.**

Aldrich Gonzales, the club’s adept manager, skilfully oversees operations. His leadership is complemented by two student coaches: **Ali Saleem, a Level 1 learner, and Luke Shaw, a seasoned Level 4 learner.** Together, they foster an

environment of camaraderie and resilience. Notably, Aldrich maintains a strong connection with the **Football Association Leadership Academy**, where he proudly serves as an ambassador this year. His regular reports contribute to the club's growth and alignment with broader football initiatives.

Looking ahead, the Kickin' Stigma Men's Mental Health Football Club harbours ambitious goals. They aspire to join a competitive league and secure valuable sponsorships, further amplifying their impact within our educational ecosystem.

“Holocaust Memorial Commemoration: The Fragility of Freedom”

As always DSU supported the **holocaust memorial commemoration** working with Cllr Keiran Casey and community and faith leaders to bring together **one of the biggest anti-racism events in the region.**

DSU President Jack Stokes performed a poem reading about this



year's theme **'The Fragility of Freedom'**. This year we were joined by **Holocaust Survivor Steven Frank BEM** who was born in 1935 in Amsterdam to a secular Jewish family, his father, a Dutch lawyer, joined the Dutch Resistance during World War II helping to hide and protect other Jews. Despite his father being arrested and sent to Auschwitz, his family's placement on the Barneveld list spared them from deportation and undoubtedly saved the lives of his family. Surviving Terezín (Concentration Camp), he and his family were liberated in 1945. After a journey to Britain, they settled in Hertfordshire, where Steven shares his Holocaust experiences in schools and colleges across the country. It was great to **welcome Steven to Dudley and his story was powerful and not one anyone in attendance is likely to forget anytime soon.** It is important to remember the atrocities of the past to ensure they never get repeated.



“Harry Potter Trip: the magic of the wizarding world”

We once again **took 50 students to Harry Potter Warner Brothers Studios**, to witness the magic of the wizarding world. It was a great day for students to learn more about the **incredible creation of Harry Potter**.

Final Notes from us

“Website reform: A digital transformation designed for Students' Unions”.

In recent months, we've embarked on a journey to **revamp and elevate our digital presence** by engaging in discussions with specialised website providers catering specifically to Students' Unions (SUs). Our aim is to **create a website that is not only modern and interactive but also seamlessly user-friendly**.

The reason behind this ambitious reform stems from a recognition of the benefits it promises to deliver. By embracing cutting-edge technology and design principles, our revamped website will offer **enhanced ease of updating, coupled with robust web and digital support systems**. Ultimately, this translates to a superior user experience for our students, empowering them with access to vital information and resources at their fingertips.

Our website stands as the **cornerstone of our Union's outreach efforts, serving as the primary source for information and often the first interaction with our student body**. As the virtual face of our organisation, its significance cannot be overstated—it represents our commitment to transparency, accessibility, and professionalism.

Moreover, a robust online presence is not just advantageous; it's essential for the success and sustainability of our Union. A well-crafted website not only **lends credibility to our organisation but also enhances our competitiveness in securing vital funding and support through grant applications**.

This website overhaul marks a pivotal moment in DSU's digital evolution, representing the next **logical step in our ongoing commitment to innovation and excellence**. The time for this transformation is now, and we are poised to embrace the opportunities it presents with **enthusiasm and determination**.

Check out everything we are doing and follow us on socials:

Instagram: **@dudleysu_**

Tiktok: **@dudleysu**

Youtube: **@dudleycollegesu**

Facebook: **@dudleysu**

Website: <https://www.dudleysu.co.uk/>

This has been a great year so far, with plenty to celebrate, we will strive to continue our work of **representation, skills development and community building**.