

Statement from The Students' Union President 2023-2024



“I have served as The President of Dudley College Students' Union for a year now, completing my first term in office, it has been an amazing but challenging experience. I am proud of the work Dudley Students' Union has done over the past year to support and advocate for students. A constant theme throughout my Presidency has been focusing on tackling the root causes of the issues students and apprentices face rather than coming up with surface-level

solutions that only put a plaster on the real problem.

As we approach the General Election, I have a sense of hope and belief that the crises we face as communities and individuals can be solved and the status-quo can change. I'd like to see BTEC cuts reversed, further commitment to tackle the climate crisis, real solutions to combat the cost-of-living and mental health crises making the basics cheaper and more accessible, cutting the cost of public transport, slashing food prices and taking a holistic approach to mental health intervention.

I think this is an incredibly exciting time for students, we make up 10% of the voting population and I can see tangible, actionable change coming. However, we as students and Unions can not become complacent, we must continue to fight for each other and stand up for what is right. Across the country we see an insurmountable rise in transphobic attacks and hate crime, people dying on NHS waiting list, and people fleeing from hostile environments being villainised and targeted by hate, rhetoric, and inhumane legislation.

Its time we fixed our broken society, our broken promises, and our broken education system.

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- The Students' Union aims to represent and advocate for the interests, concerns, and welfare of its members. This involves engaging with college administration, local and national authorities, and other stakeholders to ensure that students' voices are heard, and their needs are met.

Skills development- Encouraging student engagement and participation in the wider community through volunteering, fundraising, and other activities.

Creating community- Promoting diversity, inclusivity, equity and belonging among the student population and providing a range of sports, societies, and other extracurricular activities that help students to build social connections and develop new skills.

Representation- including campaigning, lobbying and liberation work.

Elections: Who's the next President?

In June we held our annual Presidential Election, **3 candidates stood** after 1 withdrew. Sitting President Jack Stokes, Broadway Campus Leader Duncan Barnett and Football Club Coach and Volunteer Ali Saleem. With over **700 votes cast** we are so excited to announce that Jack Stokes has been elected as President-elect 2024-25 having **511 votes cast in his favour winning 73% of the vote in a decisive**

victory. Jack has seen a significant increase in number of votes cast for him compared to last year with 369 votes, giving Jack a clear and strong mandate to represent students and lead the Union forward.



As part of our **Politics made better campaign**, we wanted to give students the confidence to go to the ballot on election day so the process was very similar to how it happens on the day of the general election, even to the point of having to show ID. Students said how similar it felt and how it felt like they were voting for their next MP. As a way to engage student with politics we ran a **“Be an FANTA-stic voter campaign”** giving every student who voted a **free bottle of fanta**.

National Election: The Results

Our President Jack Stokes put himself forward to be the **next Vice President of Further Education for the National Union of Students**. After an intense election and voting period, Jack was unsuccessful in his bid for the role, **falling just 1 vote short of winning**, which shows how much support he had behind him and how much students from across the country believed in his vision for a stronger FE movement. We congratulate Qasim Hussain, Leeds College Students' Union President on his recent election.

Turn up: Auto-enrolment

One of the key aims of our Turn Up campaign which aims to get as many students to the ballot as possible was to implement an **opt-in voter registration system** which means students during enrolment can check a couple of boxes and through data sharing agreements with Dudley Council the students will be automatically enrolled onto the electoral register, making the process **quick, easy and accessible for students**. Currently tests with small data sets are being conducted to iron out any issues ready for the main enrolment for September. This system makes **Dudley College one of the first, if not the first college to implement it** and only **1/3 of universities have it**. Auto-enrolment can also save councils money, as otherwise they would have to contact students directly - by post, phone or in person - to ask them to register.

National Union of Students: Policy for the future

This year DSU once again attended the biggest gathering of students in Europe, NUS Liberation and National Conferences which took place during



the same week in Blackpool. These are democratic conferences and serve as the **sovereign decision-making body of the NUS**, students from across the UK come together to **discuss campaigns, network and debate policy** that sets the actions and priorities of the National Union. We took a **Delegation of 4**, SU President and Lead Delegate Jack Stokes, Inspired Campus Leader Kaynat Ahmad, Student Volunteer Elizabeth Gado Johnson, and Disability Liberation Leader Mitchell

French.

Elizabeth said “My experience at the Blackpool 2023 NUS conference was eye-opening and exhilarating. I got to meet a lot of people from different backgrounds who shared similar interests with me and are passionate about what they believe in and what they want to achieve. I felt I was part of something bigger and that everything that happened at the conference is on its way to make an impactful and positive change. It was really a wonderful experience, and I'm thankful for the opportunity to have attended.”

This year DSU wanted to make concrete and tangible change to the structures of the National Union of Students (NUS) regarding College Students and Apprentice representation. In collaboration with the National Society of Apprentices, Sheffield College, and Leeds City College we **submitted a FE representation Policy to be discussed and debated at National Conference**. This Policy mandates that NUS increase minimum delegate entitlement for FE Unions to 2, actively campaign against BTEC cuts, guarantee a reserved FE policy space at Conference every year and make NUS spaces and campaigns more



accessible. DSU is excited to announce that **this policy passed with overwhelming support from both FE and HE delegates**. SU President Jack Stokes gave a speech as to why this policy was so important. (Jack's address to conference: [FE Policy Speech](#))

APPG: Creating a flexible education system



Jack Stokes has been a consistent voice nationally around **what students need from the next government** especially with education reforms. Jack was invited to attend an **All-Party Parliamentary Working Group** specifically looking at tertiary education and Further Education. This took place in London where Jack spoke about the **importance of flexibility in education** and providing

students with options that suit their learning style and needs, he also spoke about the vital importance of not **restricting opportunities** and forcing students down pathways that aren't right for them. Jack gave a personal recount of how options and flexibility helped him achieve what he wanted and open doors for his future.



Anti-Racism: Call to action

The Students' Union participated in the **'Pass the Baton' Anti-Racism Festival** hosted at South and City College. Organised in collaboration with the **Birmingham Race Impact Group**, the event proved to be a profoundly uplifting and inspiring day. It featured **contributions from poets, singers, dancers, and inspirational speakers**. The festival served as a call to action, aiming to empower and educate both current and future generations about **equality and justice**.

Sustainability Organising: SOS Conference

Dudley Students attended the Annual Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS) Conference. The conference gave the students the opportunity to **connect with others in the student sustainability movement**, discuss current **topics and themes** in sustainability and climate action and **developed practical skills and knowledge** in community organising.

Queer Celebration: Queer Student Awards

Jack Stokes has been invited to attend the annual and national **Queer Student Awards**. Jack in 2021 was crowned the **first ever Queer Student of the Year** for his work within the LGBTQ+ movement. Having experienced bullying for his sexuality, Jack is very passionate about supporting LGBTQ+ students and is delighted to be asked to come back to present an award to a well-deserving queer student.



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

NHS: 15 steps challenge



Fifteen students participated in the NHS 15 Steps Challenge during the May half-term. They visited Russell's Hall Hospital to **evaluate the services offered to adolescents and to provide constructive feedback on current practices**. The students' reflections will be presented to the hospital's Board, with recommendations considered for implementation. This initiative

served as a trial to assess the potential benefits of such collaboration for both the college and hospital. Students also learned about various professions within the NHS and available volunteer opportunities. As a token of appreciation, participants **received a certificate, badge, and shopping voucher**.

Duke of Edinburgh: Wider Participation

This year, we secured **£3,500 in additional funding from the Duke of Edinburgh Resilience Fund**. This has allowed us to offer participation places and equipment to students at significantly discounted costs, enabling some of our most **vulnerable and marginalised groups to take part in this life-changing award**. During the summer holidays, students will complete their



expedition section around Kinver. For many, this will be their first time venturing outside Dudley, cooking independently, sleeping in a tent, and using a map.

While the experience is a lot of fun, it also involves a great deal of hard work, but the effort is well worth it in the end. Darryll, the Award Leader, said, "Every year we see students literally transform before our eyes, growing in confidence and resilience and harnessing real skills for the future. It makes the effort all worth it."

Training: Sexual Health

Two staff members within the Students' Union have **completed retraining in the Brook C-Card condom** distribution and sexual health advice and guidance scheme. We remain committed to supporting students in **maintaining their sexual health and well-being**. Additionally, staff have participated in further training modules, including the Traffic Light Tool.

Teaching Qualification: Developing skills

Aldrich, the Youth Social Action Coordinator, has **successfully completed and passed his Level 3 teacher training**. This achievement will enhance his capability to deliver activities and training in his role effectively.

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

Creating student spaces: The Zen Den project

We are happy to say that the Zen Den project will **begin construction on the 18th July** ready for a September launch and will be a garden for connecting with nature, relaxation, and sensory support.

This project has been going on for quite some time **from inception to funding applications to student led design**. This term has seen it in its final stages of coming to life, with contractors invited in and shown the area and students making the decision on who has the vision closest to theirs for the space.

Football Club: Kickin' Stigma

Building on the success of this year's SU recreational football club, 'Kickin Stigma', which supports **over 30 members weekly**. Participants come together in a positive atmosphere, knowing that they can also share any stresses or worries with staff on the sidelines.

Throughout the year, students from the club have **disclosed worries about sexual health, coping with bereavement, managing exam stress, and dealing with disabilities**. The supportive environment of the club allows them to address these challenges openly and receive the necessary support. **Collaborating with Birmingham FA**, there are initiatives underway to expand a **recreational football club and introduce an intercollege league**. The initiative aims to provide all local colleges with the opportunity to participate in football purely for enjoyment, free from the formalities of competitive elements. Moreover, the club has received a **£1000 grant from Barclays' 'Sported Fund'**. This funding has been instrumental in



purchasing football boots for the members and essential kit for their weekly matches, ensuring they can fully engage and benefit from their football experience. (Students talking about the impact of the football club: [Student Video](#))

ESOL Award Ceremony: Culture Day



Over the year students have wanted to organise a Culture Day, **DSU collaborated with the ESOL Department to run Culture activities** such as henna as Diwali lantern painting. We did this alongside the ESOL award ceremony and other

activities such as spin the wheel and blue carpet photo opportunities. It was a nice heartfelt day that brought communities together, **DSU was happy to play a part in it.**



Sustainability initiatives: Colleges WM Sustainability Festival

Students travelled to **Fircroft College for a day of training with the outcome of a sustainability festival project to be delivered on campus.** A mixed cohort from the Afro Club and Aspire learners participated. Their project was to do a peer cooking session using the ingredients grown in Aspire Gardens to cook a traditional African recipe.



Beyond the Pitch: Ramadan Football Tournament

As part of Kickin' Stigma, we hosted a "**Ramadan Football Tournament**," inviting our local colleges. The impact went beyond the final score. **Over 80 students participated**, celebrating Ramadan and raising awareness of:

The significance of fasting: We explored the reasons behind fasting during Ramadan.

- **Combatting unconscious bias:** We discussed how unconscious biases can lead to negative attitudes towards those fasting.
- **Fasting's challenges:** We acknowledged the mental and physical demands of observing Ramadan.
- This tournament fostered **community spirit, understanding, and respect** for Ramadan traditions.

“With Birmingham FAs continuous support for the Muslim Communities across West Midlands, we are proud to see such a great event organised by Dudley college Students’ Union for all students observing Ramadan. As there aren’t many opportunities to play sports during Ramadan, an event such as this is a great way of bringing people together.” Mizan Rahman, Diversity, Inclusion & Youth Male Football Development Officer.

Pan-Disability: Football for all

Aldrich Gonsalves, Youth Social Action Co-ordinator has collaborated with Simon Howes to support the pan-disability football team. Through their efforts, we successfully engaged over 25 students. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of both the students and staff, we finished second in the Pan-disability league.



We are now planning for the next season in September, with the goal of winning the league.

Trips: Blackpool Pleasure Beach & London Sightseeing



As part of the Students' Union's annual schedule of trips, students had the opportunity to **visit Blackpool Pleasure Beach and London**. Participants reported having a fun and enjoyable experience on both trips, which helped them create **lasting memories and strengthen relationships**. For some, it was

their first visit to these locations. The Students' Union remains committed to fostering a strong student community through activities like these.

Sally Hebbard an ESOL Lecturer said “The London trip organised by Student Union in June 2024, made an enormous impact on the lives of our ESOL students. 19 students where English is not their first language attended the trip, most of them it being their first time in London. Their faces told everything, they were completely wowed by place like Trafalgar Square with it's statues and fountains, also seeing the Houses of Commons and Big Ben. It made them even more proud to now be members of the UK. We are so grateful for an event like this. Big thanks to the SU”

Final Notes from us

Strategic Plan: A clear vision

We are excited to announce the **launch of our long-awaited Strategic Plan which will run from July 2024 to July 2027**. It describes the key actions that need to be taken to develop the Students' Union and expand **our enrichment offer and enhance the overall student experience and retention rates**. We hope that students, college management and the Corporation can get behind this new and bold vision for the Students' Union. (Link to Strategic Plan: [DSU Strategic Pan](#))

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 year has been **strong for the Union** and are **incredibly proud** of the work students have done over this academic year. As always, we will strive to meet our goals and continue to advocate, represent and support students. DSU can't wait for **what's in store next year and to see the diversity and vibrancy of the students we engage with.**