

A group of students is shown celebrating at a festival, with colorful powder being thrown and covering their faces and clothes. The scene is vibrant and festive, with a blue and green color palette overlaid on the image. The text is prominently displayed in the upper left quadrant.

IMPACT & ENGAGEMENT REPORT

2023-24



**ASTON
STUDENTS'
UNION**

CONTENTS

Student Voice and Representation throughout the University

Support the NSS, Student Voice and Representation in Schools

Celebrating Our Diversity and creating a campus community

Helping students before they need it

Helping students when they need it

Helping students with their accommodation

Helping students have fun, stay healthy and become more employable

Making the building work for students

Promoting what we do and enhancing our branding and reputation

Central services (Governance, Finance and HR, Insurance)



WELCOME

FROM OUR

STUDENT OFFICERS

Hello, and welcome to Aston Students' Union Impact and Engagement Report for the past year.

The Students' Union is an incredibly diverse organisation, working to amplify the student voice of its 18,000 members and support student groups and volunteers to deliver fantastic opportunities for each other.

In what feels like the blink of an eye since we were all elected back in March 2023, we have been part of something special at the union. This report offers a brief glimpse into some of the events, activities, opportunities, and services that has made the past 12 months so memorable for so many students at Aston University.

Enjoy,

The Student Officer Team

*Adora, Atul, Juan-Carlos,
Kirsty & Taher*



STUDENT VOICE & REPRESENTATION THROUGHOUT UNIVERSITY

39

Students participated in the SU Elections, putting themselves forward to lead the organisation in 2024-25.



Our partnership with the National Union of Students and Citizens UK to campaign for voter registration amongst the student body.

2600

Students exercised their democratic right, and cast over **13,000** votes to elect their leaders for the coming year.

Aston Students' Union sent more students to the Citizens UK Mayoral Hustings event than any other SU in the West Midlands!



STUDENT OFFICERS

BIG WINS!

- ▶ In September the University was awarded TEF Gold Status, thanks in part to the Student Written Submission.
- ▶ We worked with the University Estates team to increase the capacity for Friday prayers, almost doubling this important provision for students
- ▶ The Students' Union supported the University to raise the profile of John Cadbury House as a destination for Aston Alumni.
- ▶ We submitted a further Student Written Submission for the university Access and Participation Plan.
- ▶ At the start of the year we formally opened the new social learning space for students on floor seven of the main building.
- ▶ Working with the University to create new guidance on how students may use AI now and in the future.

STUDENT VOICE

& REPRESENTATION

IN SCHOOLS

Our student officers directly speak to University senior leadership to bring to their attention key issues for students on campus.

We ran the EPS Town Hall event to consider impacts of staff changes, which was attended by over **80** students.

We increased the number of student voice advocates to over **30**, these volunteers have enhanced roles and responsibility through the college structures.

403 students registered themselves to volunteer as Course Reps, helping develop career boosting graduate skills and more importantly amplifying the student voice across the University.

The new School Representative scheme continues to shine with **25** students, taking on a leadership role with their school and course rep scheme.

This year we have introduced Research Reps, as the University looks to increase and diversify its research excellence we want to ensure that PGR students feel heard as staff members and as students.

Over **200** nominations were received for Academic Awards, one of the best nights of the year where we recognised best practise within the University staff team and the student volunteer course reps.

We continued to support the campaigns for the National Student Survey (NSS) and Post Graduate Taught Survey (PTES). Over 70% of final year undergraduates completed the NSS survey.

We support the organisation and delivery of the Inaugural Student Experience Conference, working with **BSS** and **WONKHE** to bring the stories of our students to life in front the decision makers at the University.



CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

& CREATING

A CAMPUS COMMUNITY



Supported the University's ambition to become a University of Sanctuary Status with the establishment of a Student Action for refugees Network.

THOUSANDS

of students attended Diwali, Navratri, Winter Village & Holi.

2200

students and staff enjoyed the greatest ever Astonbury.

We embedded the **SU Student Pantry** as a place to support students with the Cost of Living with additional food bundles during the year for students to take home.



HELPING STUDENTS

BEFORE THEY NEED IT

Our members often get frisky with each other, and we want to make sure they do it in a safe and consensual way.

So we have run **2** sexual health campaigns and fairs during the year as well as a partnership with city-based Umbrella - the experts in sexual health and guidance.

Our wellbeing campaigns are aimed at supporting students before they need formal help and support.

We organised **2** Wellbeing Days with over **700** students over the year.

We have provided over **2000** free breakfasts for students each Wednesday morning in an effort to combat the cost-of-living situation and provide a place for students to feel a sense of belonging.

We continue to use digital platforms as a medium to get information, advice, and guidance to students. Our informational advice video, including a walking tour of student support services at Aston University have been played **13,176** times by **6500** different student accounts.

We developed bespoke information advice and guidance about Healthcare in Birmingham for International Students.

In May mental health month our Mind, Body & Grades campaigns and workshops better prepared **XX** students for the upcoming exams.

Our Welcome Week program of events had **46** events to help manage the transition to Aston University life for new students.

We actively supported the neurodiversity living library events in the year and provide insight and a student perspective with regards to neurodiversity accessibility requirements and solutions.

Aston SU Instagram interacts with **20** students on average each week on direct messages helping with all enquiries.

Our Green Impact Report could be our best yet, proving our commitment to sustainability and driving best practise across campus, we await with baited breath for the outcome.



HELPING STUDENTS WHEN THEY NEED IT

Our Aston Student Advice service offers free impartial independent confidential advice. Students can access the service every weekday with drop-in appointments available between 10:30am - 12:30pm.

For the calendar year 2023 we supported a record number of students. **1209** students used the service with over **1400** individual cases. This number has doubled since 2020!



10,000

emails were exchanged by the Advice Service.

The Students' Union website has a Recite Me function for students who need support navigating or using the website.

Our video helping students find places to study on campus has been viewed **15,000** times.

The Students' Union building is open when the rest of campus is closed, providing students with a safe space to relax at the end of each day, and a chance to socialise.



HELPING STUDENTS

WITH THEIR

ACCOMMODATION

776

students attended our bi-annual accommodation fairs to help students understand and make better informed decisions about accommodation.

7000

bed spaces are available to view and consider on our Accommodation Portal website.

We provide the only place for accommodation, information, advice and guidance on campus. With over **3500** email exchanges, from supporting students with short stays to housing families and finding places for children.

The Green offers the best value student accommodation in the area. Saving students over **£650,000** per year, compared to on campus living and being a major recruitment USP.

The Green office and site is staffed from 10am - 4pm on weekdays plus out of hours support 24/7 (Resident Warden).

We have worked hard at creating a sense of belonging at The Green with a variety of Community events for the **160** residents.

Despite being exceptional value for money we are continuously improving the physical standard, by installing new kitchens and bathrooms.

To assist students with their own cost-of-living issues rent have only increased by **£2** per week.





HELPING STUDENTS

HAVE FUN, STAY HEALTHY

& BECOME MORE EMPLOYABLE

We support and help manage **100** sports clubs and societies, who in turn support **1035** and **2740** members respectively, providing students with life changing and life affirming opportunities for growth, learning and belonging and fun.

The largest cohort of societies are the **42** Academic Societies, who work hard to create a sense of community and belonging aligned with their courses.

Many student societies are local and meet a niche need for Aston Students, others are a part of a global network (TEDx).

Over **400** students have leadership roles within the groups, gaining and developing skills that help them stand out in the job market.

We enjoy **18** weeks of sports fixture, every Wednesday afternoon in term one and two. We play teams across the Midlands and as far away as East Anglia.

We have bought Zumba to the masses this year... well our Vice President Student Activities (and incoming President) JC has!

280 of our Sports men and women celebrated in black tie style at their annual Athletic Union Ball held at Villa Park.

Collaboration across our groups has been key this year with events such as Take Me Out, Strictly Dance Aston, Badminton cross-society tournament and Netball cross-society tournament proving immensely popular.



HELPING STUDENTS

HAVE FUN, STAY HEALTHY

& BECOME MORE EMPLOYABLE

Payments and reimbursements are made on a prompt basis to ensure they can keep track of finance for their clubs and societies. This supports them to run their activities and events.

We continue to protect freedom of speech and debate and discussion on campus with **428** guest speaker requests managed on behalf of societies. A significant increase on the previous year.

We celebrated the great student talent at Aston with not one, but two Aston Got Talent (AGT) events, with a total of 20 participants and **100s** in the audience.

We introduced the Activities Dashboard, an online portal where all events are registered, creating a more efficient and streamlined service for staff and students.



KEY STATS

TOTAL NUMBER OF EVENTS SUPPORTED

600+

TOTAL NUMBER OF EXTERNAL SPEAKERS APPROVED

400+

ROOM BOOKINGS COMPLETED

1000+

STANDOUT

STUDENT-LED EVENTS

- ▼ **Creativity in students**
Aston Asian Fashion Show
- ▼ **Dermatology Society**
Common Skin Cancers Talk
- ▼ **Aston Women in Business**
Pathways to Success
- ▼ **Friday Karaoke**
- ▼ **Love Brum Run**
- ▼ **CEAC Society**
Women in CEAC event
- ▼ **Law Society**
Pinsent Mason panel event
- ▼ **Computer Society**
AstonHack
- ▼ **Obstetrics & Gynecology Society**
Talk on Cervical Screening
- ▼ **Sikh Society**
Langar

MAKING THE BUILDING WORK FOR STUDENTS

150,000

visits in any one year.

We provide the most diverse and inclusive space for students to enjoy themselves, in our licensed venue over **35%** of all meat products we sell are Halal, no other licensed space in the city would offer such a diverse menu.

The Lounge and Shop will enjoy around **115,000** transactions in anyone year, the busiest face to face service on campus, providing some much-needed food and drink and friendly chat with each students.

The Students' Union secured a 5* Food and Hygeine rating with the City Council inspective- providing a safe space, to a high standard to eat and buy goods.

The building remained open and available to students throughout the year including bespoke opening times for key sports events (Indian Premier League).

Students will play **12,000** games of pool and the Thursday Night Quiz is always a sell-out!

We help support and promote the University Brand with **3300** branded goods sold during the year, across the world.

Our spaces will support around **12,800** visits for Friday prayers in anyone year.

We provide a space for students to watch the best live sports, without having to buy a single item!

The casual team of student staff make up the backbone of those delivering the service and have worked over **5000** hours in the year.



MAKING THE BUILDING WORK FOR STUDENTS

Our meeting room and hall facilities have been accessed over 500 times by groups and students for 1000 hours. Key events include:

ABACUS

TEDx Aston University

Late Night Parties

**Vietnamese High Commission
Ambassador Celebration Event**

Iranian New Year Nowruz

Enactus

Law Grad Ball

Diwali Celebrations

Lunar New Year on Campus

Holi

Ramadan/Iftar

**University and Union Winter
Village collaboration**

Astonbury

Sikh Society Langar

International Language Day

Welcome Week Events

Computer Society Hackathon


**University Open Days and Offer
Holder Days**

Charity Drives

Kuwait Society Fundraiser

Graduation Celebration

University Events- Alumni etc



We celebrated five years in the building, thanking and recognising the amazing opportunity and importance of the space for students and their sense of belonging.

Our Lounge space engaged with the National Best Bar No initiative to prove professionalism with which we run our hospitality services.

A BIG Thank You to the amazing estates and cleaning team for keeping the building looking like it did 5 years ago when we first opened!

PROMOTING WHAT WE DO & ENHANCING BRAND & REPUTATION

Aston Students' Union Instagram Channel has **over 8k** followers, and this channel offers a first point contact for students. We answer DM's each week and help them with their enquiry.

27,000 accounts are reached via our Instagram reels, and 'Places to Study' reel reached **10.2k** accounts with **18k** plays.

Our reels page is the best place to see vibrant and student centered content anywhere.

We have our first ever independent officer fan page for Vice President Student Activities Juan Carlos, with 98 followers.
GO JC!

The website has a bounce rate of **38%**, average engagement time **2min 24sec** and **24k** impressions.

Over **18,000** pages are reached using Recite Me accessibility tool, creating an inclusive digital experience for students.

We have further segmented our fortnightly newsletter and enjoy an average open rate of **27.2%**. This is still our most successful and important communication tool.

Our commercial partnership with Native thrived into its second year with an impressive range of student-centered promotion and events for students, with a great Welcome Fair in September.

We lit up campus in the depths of winter with amazing Astonbury External projections.



CENTRAL SERVICES

(GOVERNANCES, FINANCE & HR)

Our Audit Partner, Crowe, delivered clean audit for the organisation, showing our ability to meet our financial and legal compliance requirements.

77% staff engagement score for the year, up 4% on last year, with one of the best results for Students' Union in the country.

We welcomed new staff and roles in Student Voice, Wellbeing and Marketing.

We introduced major structural changes to our Trustee Board with the addition of an External Chair of the Board. This will provide improved oversight and consistency of the Trustee Board in its role to ensure the Students' Union is run well and well run.

Our Trustee Board agreed a new People and Culture plan for the Students' Union, this included the review and amendments of all the employments policies and procedures.

WE ARE RANKED THE BEST STUDENTS' UNION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

(WHAT UNI STUDENT CHOICE AWARDS)

