

VOTE MICHAEL UPHAM

#1 FOR EDUCATION OFFICER

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**OVERHAUL
ASSESSMENT**

**DEVELOP EFFECTIVE
FEEDBACK FRAMEWORK**

**TACKLE STRESS
AND WORKLOAD**

**IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL
REPRESENTATION**

**DESIGN FUTUREPROOF
LEARNING**

**CAMPAIGN FOR
FREE EDUCATION**

**VOTE BETWEEN 1ST-4TH MARCH
AT QBSU.ORG**

HI, I'M MICHAEL AND I'M RUNNING TO BE YOUR EDUCATION OFFICER!

Why am I running?

I'm running for Education Officer because I'm passionate about creating an education system that works for everyone and puts students first.

Currently, our wellbeing is put second to the University's profit margins. Students are suffering from outdated teaching methods and ineffective assessment models, all while being saddled with decades of debt for pursuing an education.

But this year, the impact of COVID-19 has shown that change is possible in education, that teaching methods can be transformed and the University can be forced to respond to student needs.

Next year, coming out of COVID-19, you deserve a University and a Students' Union that truly works for you. You deserve an accessible education where wellbeing is at the centre of the university experience, and students are empowered as partners in their education, with an equal voice to staff.

I have served as a student representative at every level and I know what we need to do to make sure that education at QUB works for you. I am ready to do the job, so vote Michael for Education 1st-4th March.

What have I already done?

- Represented over 7,000 students as EPS Faculty Representative 2020/21
- Represented more than 2,000 students as MAE School Rep 2019/20
- Represented my peers as MAE Course Rep 2018/19
- Created the new role of EPS International Academic Rep to give international students a voice on education
- Co-developed a new EPS Wellbeing Framework
- Led a project to investigate the link between assessment and feedback and mental wellbeing
- Redesigned assessments with the Centre for Educational Development
- Consistently advocated for student interests in committees
- Led a team of seven School Reps
- Served as Volunteer SU Intern



1. OVERHAUL ASSESSMENT

In the last two centuries, our world has changed a lot but Universities haven't kept pace and students at QUB are stuck with outdated and inaccessible teaching and assessment.

For an education system that works, we need to **change our assessment**. Learners of all different types should be able to access education and be assessed in methods which are **suited for them**. Assessments should focus on application of knowledge, problem solving, creative thinking, and other skills that are far more necessary in the modern world. In a world-class university, we should expect leading, world-class education and assessment. Moreover, **no assessment should be worth more than 40%**, so a single bad day cannot affect a whole module's mark.

Students also deserve permanent Safety Nets, **including free and uncapped resits**. Making students pay extra money, on top of the already ridiculous fees, only excludes students from earning the grades they deserve. Money should not be a barrier to education, and we should not be excluding those who can't pay from getting the degree they deserve.

We also need to **end bunched deadlines**, which lead to undue stress, burnout and poorer performance. This isn't good enough and we need a **coordinated assessment structure**, ensuring students are not put under intense pressure for long periods of time. We should also lobby for **no assignments over holiday breaks**, such as Christmas. Students are meant to relax and recuperate during the holidays. It is also a time in which students do not have access to their lecturers, or the library. It is unfair to expect students to create high quality work when their access to resources is so limited. If a staff member is not expected to mark assignments over Christmas, why should students be expected to write them? We need to give students back the time they deserve.

2. DEVELOP EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK FRAMEWORK

Feedback is key to development in education. It should be detailed, specific, personalised, and provide comments on both the strong and the weak areas of the work. It should detail a path for development for the next piece of work. It should also be provided promptly, to ensure students can take action on it promptly. And it certainly should be given in advance of the next piece of work being submitted!

Unfortunately, that's not what students are getting right now. The University does not have a framework for feedback, leading to huge variation in quality across the University. I would create a **University-wide Feedback Framework**, detailing effective feedback. I will also **push for staff to be held accountable** to the rule to return feedback within twenty working days and ensure you get feedback on all pieces of work, **including exams**. There should also be the option to receive formative feedback **prior to the submission deadline**, and this should be offered on all assignments. A student submitting an assignment does not exist in a bubble, they should be able to ask for help, guidance, or clarification surrounding their work, in order to get the grades they deserve.



3. TACKLE STRESS AND WORKLOAD

Stress and workload is intrinsically linked to assessment. In fact, the SU's OMNI study showed that academic pressures are the number one factor for poor mental health. Anyone can see that the University has a duty of care to **investigate the link between wellbeing and academic pressures and take action to tackle these stressors.**

For example, too often, students suffer from poor planning of assessments and have to cope with multiple deadlines in one week, revising over Christmas, or working into the late hours of the night to keep on top of study. Staff don't understand that we are trying to balance more than one module, alongside part-time jobs, family commitments, clubs, societies or a social life. The University needs to better plan assessments, taking into account their weighting and format to remove a major cause of stress. We need to **create stress heat maps**, showing the distribution and weighting of assignments across subjects. This would help schools to spread assignments and relieve the huge burden of deadline pressures from students. This would also provide an insight into when students may be experiencing higher levels of stress, which could **help aid and inform the student support services** within the University.

4. IMPROVE INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATION

International students pay huge fees to attend Queen's but this year has clearly shown that their money is more important than their experience to the University. These students often get little say about their education, and are underrepresented in the rooms where decisions are made. All students should get a say in how they experience their education, including how it could be made more accessible. As the EPS Faculty Rep, I have worked with the Queen's International Student Society to create the role of International Academic Representative, who works alongside School Reps to help represent the international students in the Faculty. We need to **introduce an International Academic Representative in every Faculty** and empower all our international students to have their voice heard on education.

International students also need more support, including **better timetabling**. Exams need to be **24 hour take home assignments**, to ensure international students do not need to sit exams in the middle of the night. Accessibility of education is a huge issue, and **language can also be a huge barrier**. I would push the University to implement a multilingual auto-captioning service for lecture recordings, meaning that students could access their education in the language they are most confident in, whether it be English, Irish, Mandarin, Arabic, or any other language. I would also want to extend this range of languages to the QUB website. By providing options to view the pages in other languages, the University would be showing they understand that being a globally leading university means supporting students from all over the world.



5. DESIGN FUTUREPROOF LEARNING

The pandemic has clearly highlighted that Higher Education in its current format is no longer fit for purpose. The changes introduced as a consequence of COVID-19 demonstrates that there is a clear path to reforming our education system, and taking QUB into the 21st Century. We need to reform our teaching methods, including by making lecture recording permanent. We also need to reform our assessment and create an environment where every student can thrive in the future.

To do that, it is imperative that we **reform the personal tutoring system**. Currently, the system just does not work - students might not even know their names! This needs to change. Students need a direct link to a member of staff and better communication between staff and students. I would lead a project to reform this system and give students the support they deserve.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of access to technology in modern education. Writing an essay is very difficult without a laptop, accessing teams is difficult without a strong enough internet signal. Why should students be at a disadvantage because they don't have access to high range or expensive equipment? I will lobby the University to **invest money into a Digital Fund** for access to laptops, and work with businesses to provide discounted wifi services for students.

A futureproof education also needs to work for all our students, including those from marginalised communities. For example, it is so important that the Irish language is protected, nourished and supported within QUB. I've consistently voted in favour of Irish language rights, including bilingual signage. Irish language speakers deserve to see their language written and represented in the University. I would push for the University to acknowledge, respect, and uphold the rights of Gaeilgeoirí in education.

6. CAMPAIGN FOR FREE EDUCATION

Education should be free. It should be recognised as a right, not a privilege. Students should not be saddled with thousands of pounds of debt for choosing to come to university. Students should be partners, not customers, in their education. It is unfair for graduating students to head into the working world with a mountain of debt behind them. The UK has some of the highest tuition fees in the world. We know from research that working-class students are more likely to avoid University because of this debt and research has also shown that countries with free education are more innovative and productive.

It doesn't have to be this way. COVID-19 has proven that the government has enough money to fund our public services, including education.

I will work with our national unions to lobby for free education, making sure that our local MLAs and MPs take action for us. **Tuition fee debt should be written off, and fees refunded for those students who paid upfront.** The government should then work with students and staff to create a plan for fully-funded education. We can't wait any longer. It is time the government and universities stopped putting this pressure onto the students who walk through their doors and started treating education as a public good.

