

Priority Topics (2026-27) for the Student Vote, Spring Elections 2026

1. Wellbeing and Belonging	Address the factors that most strongly shape student wellbeing: student connections and friendships; and the barriers to students settling in, being engaged and being supported.
2. Improving Uni for Students Who Travel	Improve the day-to-day experience of students who commute to University. Address practical barriers identified by students and pursue a uni-wide plan for a more fulfilling commuter student experience.
3. Supporting Disabled and Neurodivergent Students	Support a vibrant student community for students with disabilities, neurodivergence and health barriers. Ensure these students' experiences are better understood and reflected in how decisions are made and helping them enhance their course-level experience.
4. Extracurricular Activities for All	Make it easier for students to get involved in extracurricular activities and improve the experience when getting involved. Help students to organise student activities and raise awareness of opportunities for students to develop skills in the student experience.
5. Enhance your Course Experience	Enhance the course experience by seeing student concerns and ideas taken forward and championing the Course Rep system as the way to make courses better for all. Improve the assessment and feedback experience where students have told us it is not working consistently.
6. Students for a Sustainable Future	Ensure that the University and Students' Union are playing their part in ensuring that the next generation has a planet to inherit and ensure that everyone is aware of their responsibilities in combating the climate crisis.

Topic 1: Wellbeing and Belonging

What students are saying?

Most students report feeling a sense of belonging, and many describe positive aspects of their university experience, particularly supportive staff and friends. Course communities and peer friendships emerge as the most prominent drivers of belonging among students.

The evidence shows that student wellbeing outcomes are becoming more mixed. In 2024, 50% of students surveyed told us their wellbeing had improved since starting university, but only 33% said so in 2026. A fifth of students surveyed in 2025-26 reported their wellbeing having worsened since starting University, and 37% of students surveyed said that support for wellbeing, stress and day-to-day challenges could be better (rising to 47% among International students).

Over a third (34%) of students reported balancing multiple commitments as one of their top-most daily concerns. This is supported by open-text responses:

- Financial strain is a major concern for many students and, for some, directly affects their ability to engage fully in their studies and everyday university life.
- Academic pressures, incl. workload and assessment timing, are linked to stress.
- Balancing multiple commitments, such as paid work, caring responsibilities or commuting, adds to daily pressure for a significant number of students.
- Accessing support and settling in is uneven, with international students, mature students and those with complex lives more likely to say that existing support and integration into the university community could be better.

A thematic analysis of 137 comments suggested positive drivers of wellbeing were:

- Peer relationships and friendships
- Confidence and self-belief
- Staff support and approachability
- Routine and structure

What the Priority will focus on?

This Priority will pick up where the 2025-26 Priority left off; it will shine a light on the factors that most strongly shape wellbeing at the University, as identified by students themselves:

- how financial, academic and daily pressures affect students' ability to manage uni life;
- how experiences of connection, loneliness and support differ across student groups;
- and where existing systems, structures, or practices make it harder for some students to settle in, stay engaged, or feel supported.

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

The Committee will continue the 25-26 action plan, exploring structured schemes for students to connect with other students from the moment they join the University and in Halls of Residence. Examples of further activities include:

1. Seeking out particular student groups more isolated than others with targeted support.
2. Raising awareness of mental health challenges and of student support available to students.
3. Ensuring students are the primary drivers of achievement in the University's continued Mental Health Charter accreditation.
4. Collaborating with University staff to embed headline Student Support contact points and services in the opening slide of all lectures and academic presentations.

Topic 2: Improving Uni for Students Who Travel

What students are saying?

Many students (44% of those surveyed) travel more than 30 minutes to campus by bus, train or car; we refer to these students as 'commuter students' because their travel to and from campus is a distinct part of their student experience.

54% of students surveyed said they lived with their families and many students live a significant distance from campus. Among students in Luton and Bedford, 55% of students live within Luton and Bedford in term-time, but a third of students said they lived outside of the county of Bedfordshire.

Commuter students are significantly more likely to say that travelling to and from campus limits their ability to take part in social and community life. Around half identify travel as a main reason for not engaging beyond teaching, compared with a much smaller proportion of students who live closer to campus.

Commuter students are more likely to report that financial concerns make it difficult for them to engage fully in their studies. They are also less confident about accessing urgent financial help when needed. This indicates a higher level of financial strain alongside lower confidence in navigating support at critical moments.

Commuter students report lower confidence in achieving good marks and are more likely to feel that their timetable or teaching pattern did not fully match what they expected when they accepted their course.

Most commuter students say they belong at the university, but to a lesser degree than non-commuters. In qualitative research with students, "distance/commuting" and "limited campus presence" are explicitly cited as primary barriers to belonging; and commuters are more susceptible to social isolation, which is the most prevalent barrier to belonging, often a result of spending less time on campus outside of formal teaching hours (students can feel that social opportunities are exclusive to them).

Students point to University actions that have further burdened commuters rather than support them: the removal of a shuttle service and introductions of parking fees at Bedford, and late publication of timetables, all cause additional complexity for commuting students.

What the Priority will focus on?

This campaign will focus on improving the day-to-day experience of students who commute to University. It will address practical barriers identified by students and pursue a uni-wide plan for a more fulfilling commuter student experience.

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

Once elected the Student Affairs Committee will develop an action plan. Examples of activities within this Priority are:

1. Consult students on timetabling preferences, seeking a timetable and social schedule sympathetic to commuters.
2. Establish a commuter student network that connects students and enables regular messaging about support in the student experience.
3. Launch a commuter manifesto that calls for key student-led changes in the student experience.
4. Universal lecture access - all lectures be consistently recorded and made available online.
5. Lobby for dedicated commuter facilities to help reduce costs and make life easier and more comfortable for commuting students.

Topic 3: Supporting Disabled and Neurodivergent Students

What students are saying?

When surveyed, 35% of UK/Home students said they had at least one disability or long-term health condition (compared to 4% among International students). These students were less confident in how their courses work for them. It's believed many will have a neurodivergent condition (such as a social or communication impairment).

Fewer disabled students report that their course has a clear structure, and fewer feel they have meaningful choice in how they are assessed. Only a quarter said they were confident in achieving good marks last semester, almost half that of non-disabled students.

Disabled and neurodivergent students are more likely to experience ongoing strain alongside their studies. They are significantly more likely to report difficulty coping with their course, and mental health is much more likely to feature among their top daily concerns. While some disabled students report improvements in wellbeing since starting university, a larger proportion report that their wellbeing has worsened.

Disabled students are also more likely to identify practical and confidence-related barriers to taking part in student life, including timetabling, family commitments, low confidence and not wanting to attend activities alone.

The proportion of students indicating a disability is rising year-on-year and the University aims to recruit more students with disabilities, yet disabled students are a minority voice in the students' union's advocacy. Although most students feel confident raising concerns, disabled students are less confident than their peers about reporting problems or making formal complaints if something goes seriously wrong.

What the Priority will focus on?

This Priority will focus on:

- Supporting the growth of a student community for students with disabilities to connect, organise and feedback.
- Enhancing the course-level experience for students with disabilities.
- Ensuring disabled students' experiences are better understood and reflected in how decisions are made.

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

Once elected the Student Affairs Committee will develop an action plan. Examples include:

1. Getting more detailed feedback from disabled and neurodivergent students on changes they'd like to see in the student experience.
2. Working with engaged disabled and neurodivergent students and Student Support to engage more students in an active disabled student community.
3. Work with disabled and neurodivergent students to identify their top course enhancement ideas.
4. Run a campaign showing that the vast majority of the student body values diversity (research shows that telling all students that their peers support inclusion improves the climate for marginalised groups).

Topic 4: Extracurricular Activities for All

What students are saying?

Many students are aware of societies, sports and social opportunities. Most say they have *some* access to them, and a majority feel that social opportunities meet their needs. However, active and sustained engagement is much lower and some students face clear barriers to getting involved in student life outside the classroom.

Only a minority of students report fully taking part in extracurriculars. Many students want more chances to connect and build skills, however many are unclear how to start, who to contact or how to turn interest into action. Students at the University of Bedfordshire consistently tell us that gaining the right skills, experiences and career anxieties are top concerns, and extracurricular activities can build valuable skills and experiences.

Around half of students feel their course provides strong access to workplace-relevant skills, industry insight or real-world experience, but a substantial proportion say this is limited or absent. Over a quarter of students (26%) feel that the practical elements of their course are significantly or very different from what they had expected before starting at Bedfordshire.

In the past three years over 1,500 students have given direct feedback on the course-level priorities they want their reps to focus on. The top-most action requested was for more practical hands-on activities and experience, real-world examples and industry exposure.

Career advice and support is used by many students, yet 42% of students said the support for career planning and finding future opportunities “could be better”.

What the Priority will focus on?

This Priority focuses on:

- Reducing barriers to extracurricular involvement, particularly where travel, time pressures, confidence, or social anxiety make it harder for students to participate.
- Improving the experience of getting involved, so that societies, clubs, sports and social activities feel more welcoming, accessible and easier to join.
- Helping organisers organise – the SU is seen as a clear and supportive route for students who want to take part in, or help shape, extracurricular activity.
- Campaigning among students and Course Reps to ensure they are receiving the career-related learning they expected when starting their course.

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

The Committee will work with students to improve how extracurricular opportunities are designed, communicated and experienced, so that more students can take part in ways that fit their lives and circumstances. Once elected the Student Affairs Committee will develop an action plan.

Examples include:

1. Clear guidance on how to get involved, practical support from the Students' Union.
2. Build peer networks as a precursor to students taking on leadership opportunities.
3. Find out more: get a clearer picture of what helps and what hinders student involvement in societies, clubs, sports and social activities.
4. Advocate for more diverse assessment options as part of the course design.
5. Lobby for a university-wide scheme where students earn academic credit for developing "soft" skills and professional competencies in extracurricular activities within the student community.
6. Campaign with Course Reps to gauge the industry insight students feel they get in their courses and lobby the University for more consistency across subject areas.

Topic 5: Enhance your Course Experience

What students are saying?

Students are broadly positive about their courses, but there's room for improvement. Coping with study is a daily concern for many students, particularly among Undergraduates; as many as 30% lacked confidence in accessing practical info and support when needed.

- 65% of undergraduates feel teaching supports effective learning to achieve high grades "a lot", 35% said "a little" or "not at all". Similar patterns appear in how clearly courses are structured and how learning develops over time.
- Not all students report having full advance notice of timetables and assessments, or consistent access to staff. Late or unclear communication is repeatedly highlighted.
- Most students report receiving assessment feedback on time (60%), but not all. Around 2-in-5 students say feedback can be or seem late.
- Many students find feedback helpful, but a significant proportion say it does not always help them improve. Students repeatedly highlight a need for feedback before the next assessment, and specific feedback that explains how to improve next time.
- Around one in five students report that their course content or teaching methods differed from what they expected when they accepted their place.
- Not all students feel confident speaking up. Around 1-in-4 students are not confident raising concerns when something on their course or placement seems wrong.

Over the past three years, more than 1,500 students have provided direct feedback on course-level priorities. This evidence shows a growing and sustained concern about assessment and feedback (particularly the timeliness and quality of feedback, assessment schedules and changes) alongside wider pressures relating to workload and life-study balance, the importance of approachable staff and anxiety around placement administration.

Students want Course Reps to improve communication about timetables, assessments and course changes, better feedback loops between students and staff, ensure concerns are raised early and addressed and extend to issues in educational spaces.

What the Priority will focus on?

This Priority will focus on improving the course and assessment experience by:

- empowering the student voice and improving how course-level concerns are surfaced and addressed,
- improving the assessment and feedback experience where students have told us it is not working consistently, and
- championing the Course Rep system as the way to make courses better for all.

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

Once elected the Student Affairs Committee will develop an action plan. Examples include:

- 1) Take the Course Rep system to the next level as a means to raise quality across all courses - seeking greater recognition for Course Reps, supporting them to be more visible in their courses as the key link between students and staff.
- 2) Work with students to understand the problems fully and explore how they affect different groups of students; work with faculties to improve on recurring issues such as placement admin, staff contact, timely information and assessment feedback.
- 3) Collect student feedback on how to improve assessment and choice within subjects.
- 4) Explore a collaborative solution with the University, such as a Feedback Charter.

Topic 6: Students for a Sustainable Future

What the Priority will focus on?

1. Build climate and sustainability knowledge across the University
2. Advocate for sustainable and ethical investments from both the University and Beds SU
3. Develop a greener and more sustainable campus
4. Advocate for sustainable and climate conscious behaviour changes from the University and Students' Union

How the Student Affairs Committee will take the Priority forward?

Examples of further activities include:

1. Climate and sustainability education
 - 1.1. Design and execute an informative campaign that will provide students with information on climate and sustainability behaviour changes that will run continuously throughout the year across a range of media formats (e.g. video, podcast, blog)
 - 1.2. Advocate for an optional additional credit unit that educates students with a foundational knowledge of how their discipline relates to sustainability and climate change, with opportunities for students to cocreate projects that improve sustainability and impact on the climate.
2. Sustainable, ethical, and climate conscious financial decisions
 - 2.1. Complete an audit of financial investments that the University has made and assess them based on their impact on sustainability, ethics, and impact (direct or indirect) on the climate.
 - 2.2. Advocate for the University to ensure that business partnerships are in the best interests of sustainability, ethics, and the climate.
 - 2.3. Advocate for the Students' Union to ensure that business partnerships are in the best interests of sustainability, ethics, and the climate.
3. Lobby the University for a greener and more environmentally friendly campus in the University's Estates & Facilities masterplan and seek to implement improvements in the short term.