



Introduction

As we enter the new financial and academic year, we are delighted to provide University Council with a snapshot summary of just some of the SU's contributions to the student experience here at Sheffield. This iteration of our report focuses on the Welcome period, which is a pivotal time to define who we are, what we're about and why students want to be a part of it with us. We believe that Welcome showcases the SU at its best.

The SU supports new and returning students to settle into and navigate University life, creating opportunities for members to form connections, friendships & communities which help foster an early sense of belonging.

There is substantial evidence which shows that when students feel they belong, they are better able to fulfill their potential, and that positive engagement and belonging indicators often correlate with positive wellbeing, academic achievement, progression, and overall positive student outcomes. Welcome is a key opportunity to foster a sense of belonging and create a wonderful first impression for students.

Welcome 2026

Welcome 2026 reframes 'Welcome' from a single induction week, to the beginning of a longer journey into friendship, community and participation. Activity will extend across a 50-day period, with continued routes into SU, University and Sheffield communities throughout the academic year.

This plan responds directly to the 2025 Welcome evaluation. Students were generally positive about Welcome and described the SU and its staff as friendly. However, some students found the experience crowded, overwhelming or difficult to navigate. Feedback identified a need for earlier

and clearer information, more accessible and lower-pressure activities, a wider range of times and venues, and more sober, quiet and small-group opportunities.



Welcome 2026 - Focuses



1. Connections

- Extended programme & communications across 50 days
- Goin': connecting students before they arrive
- Lecture shout-outs: aiming to meet every new student!
- Residence Life: moving-in weekend presence, Give it a Go in residences, Wellbeing Wednesdays & local free trips





2. Belonging

- More daytime & drop-in activity
- Loads of sober socials
- Targeted community-building, peer hosts & regular contact
- Enhanced Postgraduate Welcome
- Discover Sheffield Fair: city connections & belonging beyond the University



3. Support

- Student Essentials Fair: quieter, supportive expansion of Find Your Feet Day
- Pass it On
- More ambassadors, accessible information & friendly professional guidance
- 'Check In' Week (Week 4)
- Evaluation through pulse surveys, engagement data, & student stories



Welcome 2026 places greater emphasis on students whose belonging and engagement outcomes have been lower, particularly postgraduate, disabled, international, mature and commuter students. Inclusive mainstream activity will be combined with targeted community-building, peer hosts and repeat opportunities to connect. The strategy aims to reduce differences in Welcome satisfaction between demographic groups to less than 0.2 points.

Key developments include:

- A 50-day Welcome programme - with more daytime and drop-in activity and targeted support around the Week 4 'wobble' period for students.
- Pre-arrival communities through the Goin' platform, enabling students to make connections and access information before arriving (more on this below).
- Enhanced provision for postgraduate and other priority groups, supported by improved accessibility, more sober socials and targeted community activity.
- Stronger academic connections, including SU involvement across all School inductions
- An enhanced Student Essentials Day, providing lower-pressure access to practical support, information and guidance.



- A broader Discover Sheffield Market, showcasing local activities, volunteering, civic opportunities and businesses.

Success will be assessed through participation data, pulse surveys, demographic analysis, repeat engagement and student stories. Our headline ambitions include maintaining overall belonging scores at or above 4 out of 5, reducing differences between demographic groups and demonstrating student engagement beyond the initial Welcome period.

“My experience has been very positive so far. The activities were enjoyable and well organised, and they gave me an opportunity to meet new people and feel more connected to the university community.”

— Activities Fair participant



The numbers help tell the story. Over 8000 students joined us for the Freshers & Freebies Fair, and again 8000 explored new groups and communities at the Activities Fair. Almost 6000 Give it a Go tickets were sold, a further 2000 tickets for society events, and over 4000 new society memberships were purchased.

Student Essentials Day and Discover Sheffield Market offered a slightly quieter pace, helping us create more accessible spaces for meaningful conversations.

Across the two days, students took part in a treasure hunt and a special Taskmaster challenge, and connected with a wide range of support services and local organisations.



There was a fair on every day of Welcome week - the quotes from students demonstrate the success of these events:

- **Monday's Freshers & Freebies Fair** - *'Great because I discovered lots of websites and companies helping make things more affordable'*
- **Tuesday's Activities Fair** - *'It was really amazing to meet new societies that piqued my interest and made me positively reconsider how I am going to spend my time in Uni. Everyone is lovely and friendly and I hope I make more friends.'*
- **Wednesday's Student Essentials Day** - *'Fun! Loved the free cake at the advice centre and the people at the events are very friendly. A bit disappointed that the pass it on went out of stock on kitchen utensils so quickly, but other than that I had a bunch of fun'*
- **Thursday's Discover Sheffield Market** - *'Such a fun experience, met loads of new people. It was good to see some of the local markets and see what's available in the city'*
- **Friday's Sports Fair** - *'Great as I developed a good understanding of what all the different sport societies available to me are and what they each offer. This helps me make an informed decision about where I think I'd like to put my time.'*



In addition to the fairs the SU delivered 40 "Introducing Sheffield Students' Union" talks to departments and schools across the University. 83 GIAGs (Give it a Go) were run during Welcome Week, with 94% of these being student-led. There were 31 targeted events run for PGR, PGT, International, Disabled, Commuter and Mature students. Feedback on these was very positive: *'Very fun, very inclusive to beginners'; 'My experience was great, I met many like minded people'*. In addition 554 'Change Making' conversations were held with new students by the Student Influence team.

The numbers only tell part of the story - there were Welcome vignettes playing out wherever we looked. Take, for example, the student who came to a SU stall - she was clearly overwhelmed and became tearful as she spoke about her worries around making friends and finding her people. The SU team invited her to join the Taskmaster challenge, which gave her a natural way to talk to others while they completed the activities together. Half an hour later, she was part of the group, laughing, smiling and looking much more at ease. These small windows into students' experiences show the real impact of what we do—far beyond the figures.





Our evening programme also smashed it, with more than 14,000 tickets purchased for club nights and events across the week, and outlets performing well too.

Throughout Welcome week we observed that familiar mixture of nervousness and excitement, and we love that the SU can play such an important part in their first days and weeks at university—and in creating that early sense of belonging.

In many ways, this is only the beginning, of course. We've extended Welcome beyond a single week and made it the start of a longer community-building journey that runs across this first term. After the 'regular' Welcome week we delivered Postgraduate Welcome Week, and a couple of weeks later we will run our first Check-in Week (or 'Wobble Week'), in partnership with the University. This will support students at a point in the term when they may begin to feel overwhelmed, stressed or uncertain, as the initial excitement settles and academic work and other responsibilities become more real.



[Goin' to the University of Sheffield](#)

In our previous report to Council we discussed the Goin' app that was about to be launched. The 'Goin' app for Sheffield pre-arrival students focuses on building community and belonging for students *prior* to their physical arrival, creating connections based on common interests, home country, or other aspects. Student ambassadors were trained to utilise the system, responding to questions and nurturing authentic, peer-led communities.



This pilot project responded to the data and insights over recent years regarding 'cold starts' for new students, particularly those from particular demographics, who arrive without knowing anyone, which then acts as a further barrier to them physically engaging with events or activities.

We were delighted that around 600 new students joined the Goin' community and our early observations indicate that the trail was a success and we have ambitions to, potentially, expand to offer holders next year, post-evaluation.

57 nationalities were represented in the Goin' community, with **767** connections made between students of different nationalities.

"I love this idea, I also do love that it's exclusive to invite links when you want to register so that it's students. I've been struggling to find flatmates in building, and while some do it through TikTok, the thought of everyone online being able to see it scares me and with Goin' it feels much much more safe!! I think this app will make me way more comfortable meeting people during Welcome Week, I've already met a few people through the Thank you!!" - International Student, about to start an Urban Studies and Planning Course

Feedback from incoming students has been overwhelmingly positive - we could have selected dozens of comments similar to the one above.



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On average, each incoming student made a **connection with 4 other students** before they arrived in Sheffield. There were a **2,478** connections made in Goin' in total.

We are grateful to the University for their support in promoting the Goin' app as part of pre-arrival communications.

Influence in Sheffield, the region and the UK

Of course Welcome and the associated mission of fostering 'belonging' are just part of the SU's recent activity. We also continue to work hard on the other pillar of our strategy - 'influence'.



Sheffield Students' Assembly, run jointly with Sheffield Hallam SU on behalf of around 50,000 students, was relaunched at Sheffield Town Hall in November 2025. More than 60 students and 30 stakeholders attended, including Mayor Oliver Coppard, Abtislam Mohamed MP, Olivia Blake MP, city councillors, South Yorkshire Police and the Mayoral Combined Authority. Three issue-focused Assemblies followed, on public transport, night-time safety and international students' rights, moving the Assembly from a space for feedback to one where power holders are asked to respond to specific asks.



The clearest result so far is on transport. At the Transport Assembly in March, SYMCA committed publicly to working with students on fares. Officers then met SYMCA over the summer to progress our asks. SYMCA have now launched a 7-day student tram ticket, which gives unlimited travel across the whole network, including Rotherham and Parkgate, for £16. This is a first step towards our ask for student single and day fares, particularly for students studying flexibly, for whom the 28-day pass is not financially viable.

The Assembly's work has also fed into formal responses to the consultations on South Yorkshire's future bus network and the new Supertram fleet, and into a briefing for MPs on the barriers facing international students. In 2026/27 the Assembly will focus on night-time safety and transport, spending the first semester gathering evidence with the Advice Centre and newly recruited Student Insight Facilitators. SYMCA has indicated that stronger quantitative data on student travel habits would support further changes, and this research phase is designed to provide it.

Our sustained programme of surgeries with Abtislam Mohamed MP gives students and Officers regular, direct access to a parliamentary advocate. We increasingly use it to carry Assembly outputs and wider student evidence into national debate, alongside our written evidence to the Treasury Select Committee inquiry into student loans. Regionally, the Assembly partnership with Hallam, our membership of the Yorkshire SU Advice Network and my place on the Sheffield City Goals Stewarding Group strengthen our presence where city and regional decisions are made. Our





renewed partnership with Citizens UK continues to embed community organising across this work. Nationally, we remain active participants in the Russell Group students' union community.

Officer Priorities 2026

Still on the topic of 'influence' our Sabbatical Officers have been sharing their priorities for the 2026/27 academic year, as shown in the image below.

 Sam Omondi (she/they) <i>SU President</i>	- Student Finance - Regional Student Voice - Democracy Review	 Lola-Mae Till (she/her) <i>Education Officer</i>	- Departmental Socials - Access to PGT Study - LSPs - University Engagement with the SU	 Avis Stone (they/them) <i>Liberation and Activities Officer</i>	- EHRC - Financial Aid - DDSS - Visible Representatives
 Amelia Desouza <i>Sports and Wellbeing Officer</i>	- Protect your Play - Black and Gold Community Excellence - Wellbeing and Safety	 Anna James <i>Sustainability and Development Officer</i>	- Community Hub - Community Garden - Water Quality Project	 Sana Memon <i>International and Welfare Officer</i>	- Inclusive Third Spaces - International Student Guides - Buddy Schemes - Scholarships

A key goal for the whole team this year is **increased visibility** and better student engagement with Officer projects. As a team, the Officers want to be more visible for students to be able to come and find them to discuss their ideas and concerns.

The Officers' influence work is well underway and this has included national media interviews in relation to the student finance demonstration and recent visit to 'Number 10 North' in Manchester.

During Welcome week, the Officers staffed stalls for and attended residences during moving-in weekend. As part of the Student Essentials Day our Sustainability and Development Officer, Anna, organised a hugely successful 'Pass it On' event, which gave new and returning students the



chance to pick up various household items that had been donated by departing students. More than 3,000 items were handed out in just a few hours.



The SU's own research has repeatedly demonstrated that cost of living issues are a huge concern for our students. This is why initiatives such as 'Pass it On' and our Community Hub are so important. The Community Hub brings together free food, clothing, and repair facilities in one welcoming, sustainable home. We are grateful to the University for providing additional funding for the Community Hub which has allowed this vital service to stay open over the summer.

At the '**Pass it On**' event, organised by SU Officers, over **3000 items** were given away to students. This saves students money and means fewer items such as pots and pans and other day-to-day essentials end up in landfill.





Articles of Association Review

With thanks to Council colleagues for your support during what was a particularly involved and complex process with multiple stakeholders requiring specific procedures to be followed, we concluded the review project on schedule.

The Charity Commission and Companies House confirmed their receipt and acceptance of the revised Articles in July, and the new Articles took effect as of the 1st August 2025.

For reference, the [revised AoA are available on the SU website here](#).

Bye-Laws Review

At the June SU Trustee Board meeting, pending final approval of the Articles, Trustees approved a project to review the Bye-Laws during the now current academic year.

The project brief approved by Trustees seeks to ensure that the review provides clarity, consistency and efficiency between these important documents and presents the opportunity to consider the democratic mechanisms by which “student voice” is considered.

Trustees have approved a twin-track approach to reviewing and developing the bye-laws;

The first track shall consider the rules contained within the bye-laws which seek to address regulated matters of process and conduct. Examples might include the SU’s free speech policy, elections regulations or policies relating to the creation and management of societies, amongst others. It is expected that this track will be easier and quicker to pursue, and that we may be in a position to make recommendations to Trustees over the next 2 meeting cycles.

The second track is concerned with the student voice mechanism; the system, structure, policies and processes for student expressions of opinion. Naturally, this track will require a greater level of student engagement and consultation, and should necessarily take longer to consider, consult and decide upon - at minimum lasting the full academic year 2026/27.