



Students' Union Board of Trustees

DATE: September 2022	AUTHOR: Val Newman support from Sarah Ellis, Fay Harris	STATUS: (please tick which applies) <input type="checkbox"/> For approval <input type="checkbox"/> For information only <input type="checkbox"/> For review and comment
CONFIDENTIAL: Yes/No	REPORT TITLE: Sabbatical Officer roles	
<u>Further Information</u> Paper to propose a restructure to the sabbatical officer numbers. Should the proposal be agreed to reduce down to 4 officers, the Student Voice Team will work on a number of proposals to students on what the roles will be before putting these out to an all student vote. Any new structure would be confirmed by Christmas in order that it can be run in the March elections for the 2023-34 officer cohort.		
ACTION REQUIRED BY THE COMMITTEE: Approval of the proposal		
DATE OF NEXT REPORT TO COMMITTEE: December 2022		



Officer Review

This purpose of this paper is to outline possible options for the roles and positions of Keele Students' Union sabbatical officers and proposes a reduction in numbers from 5 to 4.

Although it might at first seem antithetical to reduce representation in an organisation which is student-led and exists to represent students, there are financial implications in continuing with 5 officers and our research has shown that even with this reduction Keele SU will continue to have an above average ratio of officers to students, so our students will remain well represented.

This paper looks at *both* the financial position of Keele SU, and the national picture in terms of representation, i.e. how Keele currently stands with regards to numbers of students per officer. It also outlines how the officer team may be re-shaped.

For information, all data in this paper is based on data available in 2020; where it has been possible to update this data, this has been made clear in the relevant table or graph.

Background

Keele SU has 5 full time officers, the reference in the Constitution to the number of officers is at 22.1:

The Board of Trustees shall comprise the following persons:

22.2.1 not more than five Sabbatical Trustees, elected in accordance with clause 23;

(Clause 23 talks about secret ballots, Sabbatical Officers and Sabbatical Trustees, term of office, not being able to service more than 24 months, the necessity to be a student member at the time of their election, officers being major union office holders, and the need to enter into a contract of employment.)

The University Ordinance XV - Students' Union Code of Practice states:

Sabbatical Officer Trustees

6.1 There shall be five Sabbatical Officer Trustees of the Union who shall have specific duties and responsibilities prescribed by the Constitution and by Union Regulation.

The University Code of Practice reflects the current state. We know the University is behind this suggested change so there should be no issue having this changed. We propose the change should reflect the constitution and state 'not more than five'.

Keele is unusual, in that it has a dedicated postgraduate association. Keele Postgraduate Association, formally Keele Research Association, has had presidents since 1961. By 2015/16 they had two full time officers, President and Vice President. This is the current structure with a part-time coordinator providing administrative support. This means that Keele actually has 7 full time elected officers.

Officers' titles and roles

This suggested change provides an opportunity to change the titles and roles of the officers in the current team, as they are misleading and don't reflect the current demands on the officer team. The titles have remained pretty much the same for a number of years, although there was an important change in 2016/17 when the titles of President and Vice-President were discontinued. However the

portfolios of the officers have not been reviewed formally for a significant period of time, and this is overdue.

Elected officer roles and titles have always evolved over time. Keele's oral history projects records: President, Vice-President, Deputy President, Lady President, Secretary, Treasurer, Social Secretary, Education & Welfare Officer or Equivalents.

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/thekeeleoralhistoryproject/kusuandkpa/>

Officer roles should change to reflect the needs of students of the time, as has happened over the years. Formerly, officers used to take on operational responsibilities, with a decade ago, many Students' Unions still having 'finance' officers, leftover from when Students' Unions were made up of three elected officers and a bar manager. Their role now is far more strategic and they represent the students to the University. Their remit is focused on improving the whole student experience not managing the operations of the Students' Union.

Staffing restructures and financial position

Keele SU has recently undergone several financially driven staffing re-structures and faces significant financial challenges:

- a) In 2017, there was a staffing re-structure which resulted in a **significant** number of redundancies and staff contracts and terms and conditions were amended/standardised. (This also led to a salary reduction for some members of permanent staff).
- b) In 2018, the leadership team was restructured from 5 to 4 (from CEO and 4 Heads of sections, to CEO and 3 Heads of sections) and
- c) In 2019/20 the leadership team was restructured from 4 to 3 (from CEO and 3 Heads of sections, to CEO and 2 Deputy CEO's).
- d) In 2020 and 2021 Keele SU was significantly impacted by the COVID pandemic, unable to trade fully and unable to obtain financial support outside of the Furlough scheme
- e) In late 2021 and 2022, Keele SU made a small number of redundancies when restructuring around the new Co-op store as well as not recruiting vacant posts in commercial areas when people left
- f) In 2021 and 2022, the new Co-op opened but was loss making during its first year

During all of these difficulties, the officer team has remained static.

Salary cost of the current officer team

The annual salary cost to the organisation of having 5 full time officers is currently: **£109,937**.

This figure does not cover additional costs such as campaign costs, training and development, support, administrative costs, IT support etc.

Implications of amending the officer team from 5 to 4

If Keele SU were to decide to restructure the officer team from 5 to 4 officers, it would still remain in the top 10 (10th), with **2716** students per officer (SPO). The average being **3999** SPO. The majority of students' unions have in excess of **3000** SPO.

The salary cost to the organisation of **4** officers would be reduced to **£87,949** a saving of **circa £22,000**.

Proposal

It is proposed that the trustees of Keele SU mandate staff in the SU to reduce the full-time sabbatical officer numbers to 4. It is also proposed that in order to ensure that students have a say in the changes, that an all student vote take place on what the makeup of the officer team should be.

As can be seen from the **supporting** data below, the current number of full-time officers representing Keele students is disproportionately high when compared with the institutions in the study. Even considering Keele SU in isolation, (discounting the KPA officers) the ratio of students per officer is significantly lower than elsewhere in the sector. When considering benchmark universities, we have the lowest ratio. Restructuring to 4 officers rather than 5 would still place Keele in the top 10 in terms of ratio of students per officer. A restructure, therefore, should not adversely impact on student representation at Keele.

We feel that there could be significant advantages which can be derived from restructuring the officer team, obviously financial, but also an opportunity to tackle some of the frustrating elements of the existing structure. When the existing portfolios were created, much of the work carried out by officers was done due to the lack of staff and money to support activities. The professionalisation of the many departments in the SU mean this no longer applies. Currently, the officer's activities are weighted disproportionately. Some officers spend little or no time in university meetings, having little significant and meaningful input, properly representing students whilst others spend an inordinate amount of time in university meetings representing students. Significantly, some officers spend a substantial amount energy and time on operational activities.

It is recommended that of the circa £22,000 saved on the officer restructure, the majority of this is used to support staff with the operational aspects of activities that officers currently pick up. This will mean continuity and people being selected, not elected to carry out an operational role. This is particularly important in the area of sport (AU); we have been lucky the last few years (including this year) to have competent individuals elected, but an election of an officer not competent or interested in carrying out the required operation activities could bring the department to its knees, which is no way for an organisation to be functioning.

We would also recommend that the SU subscribes to WONKHE [Home | Wonkhe](#) which is a resource to support the whole SU team, particularly the Voice Team to ensure officers are refocused on student representation, not operational activities.

We believe that students will receive a better operational service, particularly in the area of sport and activities if they are supported by recruited staff members. Any student representation required in the area of sport can be carried out by one of the four elected officers, meaning an all-round better experience for students. This also means we are not doing a disservice to our students by allowing them to be elected in to roles which we know are operational in nature.

Whilst Student Voice will explore a number of options, we anticipate the following models or similar being proposed to students:

1. A model similar to the current team but with the Activities & Community and Athletic Union positions merged (Union Development and Democracy Officer, Education Officer, Welfare and Diversity Officer, Experience and Inclusion Officer)
2. A model which focuses on all elements of student life, allowing officers to be flexible and nimble in their projects and priorities (Education, Experience, Inclusion, Community)
3. A model which focuses on student experience and education in each faculty (President, Health Faculty Officer, Humanities Faculty Officer, Natural Sciences Faculty Officer)

4. A Non-Portfolio Officer model similar to Staffordshire University Students' Union where officers focus on priority areas of the Students' Union [Elected Officers \(staffsunion.com\)](http://staffsunion.com)

A restructured team with better, clearer and defined portfolios and proper support would empower the officer team to be more focused, more strategic and more effective in the work they do for Keele students.

Appendix 1

Supporting Data on Student to Officer Ratios

Comparative study of the current position

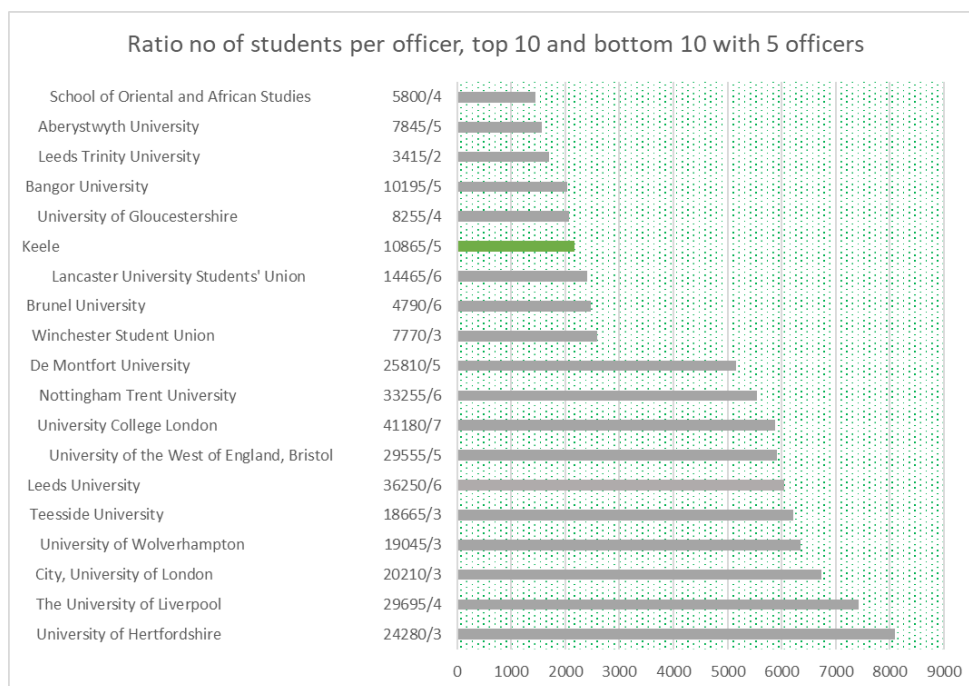
NUS conducts an annual survey of SU's, covering a range of topics related to their activities and structures. This data has been shared and from this we have been able to extract data about the number of sabbatical officers. This was augmented by HESA data about student numbers per institution. As a result, we have been able to look at a total of 58 institutions, comparing their total student numbers with their officers.

Keele University has a number of 'benchmark' universities: Aberdeen, Dundee, Hull, Kent*, Lancaster, Leicester, Reading*, Stirling*, Surrey*, Sussex, Swansea and UEA (East Anglia) *these institutions are not considered in benchmarking exercises for the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Comparing Keele with 58 Unions based on 5 officers

Data from 2020 is the most up to date accurate information. Based on that data, an analysis of the 58 institutions, with Keele SU's officer team of 5 Keele SU officers, shows that Keele has the **6th lowest** ratio of students per officer (SPO) with **2173 per officer**. The lowest being the School of Oriental and African Studies, with 1450 per student. The highest is Hertfordshire with **8093 SPO**.

The average is **2735 SPO** in the study. The majority have over 3000 SPO.



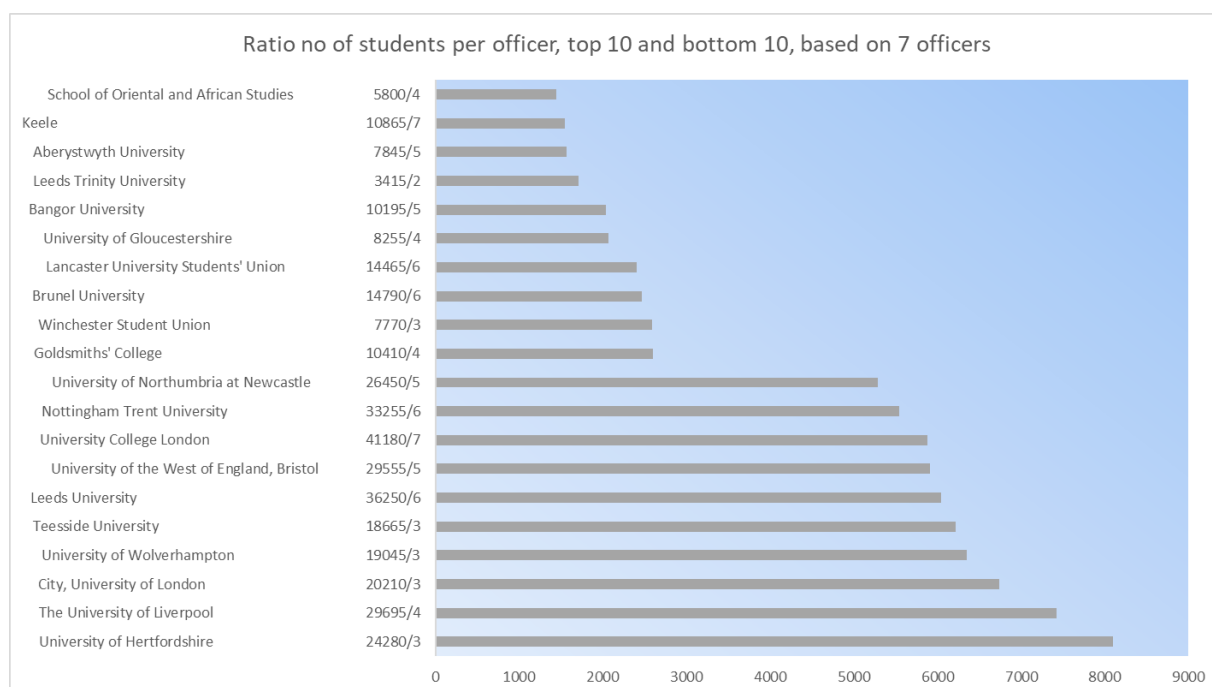
Comparison with benchmark universities.

When compared with previous benchmark institutions for this study, Keele SU with 5 officers has the lowest ratio of SPO. HESA data academic year 2020/21

Institution	Total no of students	Full time officers	Ratio of students per officer
Keele	11505	5	2301
Lancaster University Students' Union	17470	6	2912
Hull University Students' Union	14615	5	2923
Aberdeen University Students' Association	16080	5	3216
University of Leicester	16100	5	3220
University of Sussex Students' Union	19415	6	3235
University of Swansea Students' Union	21465	6	3578
Kent Union	18585	5	3717
University of East Anglia Students' Union	18975	5	3795

Comparison based on 7 officers

Based on the actual number of 7 full time officers, Keele has the second lowest ratio, when compared with all the institutions in this study, with 1552 SPO. Only one institution has a lower SPO ratio, (the School of Oriental and African Studies), the remaining 57 institutions have a higher student to officer ratio. The average is 3979 SPO.



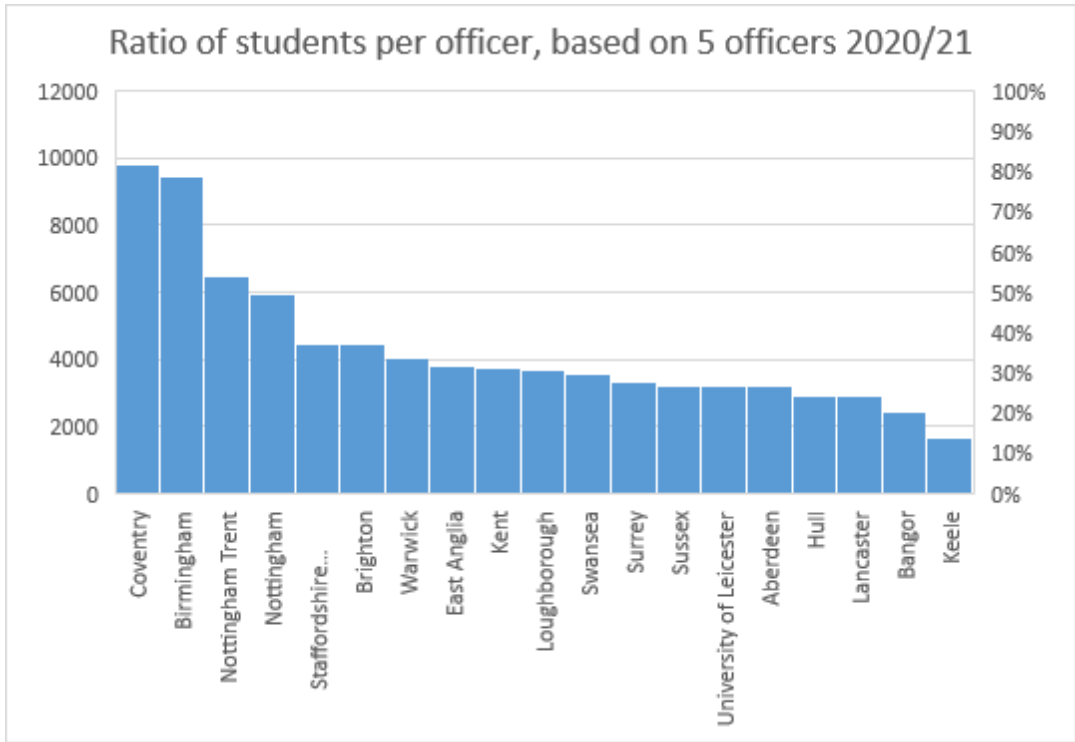
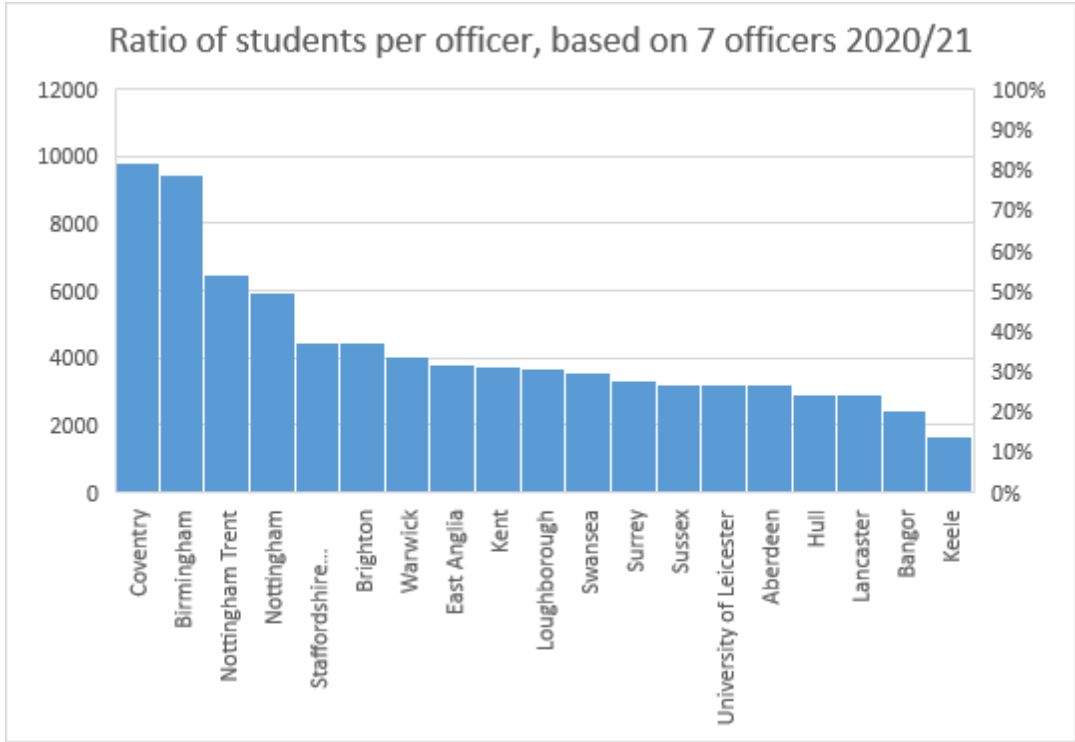


Figure 1 2020/21 HESA figures for student numbers



Ratio no of students per officer, top 10 and bottom 10 with 4 officers

