

Understanding and sharing the success of the UWS Midwifery Society



“You feel like you're part of something. And everyone wants to feel like they're part of something”

The Midwifery Society have consistently been one of the most active and impactful societies at UWS. Students on the course come together to provide each other with peer support, additional learning and friendship. This has been successfully passed down from one year to the next. In 2024/25, the Students' Union interviewed Midwifery students and staff to gain a better understanding of the society and what it has achieved. Simultaneously, their story was also reported by Wonkhe, who have used this as an example of successful student engagement at conferences and training sessions throughout the UK: [Celtic connections: School plays sell out | Wonkhe](#)

This report explains what was learnt from the interviews and how this can inform the facilitation of academic societies across UWS.

Key points

- The Midwifery Society has had a significant, positive impact on students' university experience.
- This is achieved through establishing a strong peer support network across year groups, with the aim of supporting each other through their course.
- Support and understanding from university staff was mixed and dependent on individual staff members giving time to support them. Support they have received helped provide a structure for the society to develop and sustain itself.

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Midwifery Society overview

The UWS Midwifery Society “are a group of passionate student midwives dedicated to enhancing all of our university experiences through a variety of exciting extracurricular activities, events, and opportunities for connection”: [Midwifery Society](#)

The society actively uses social media to promote their activities and build peer support across year groups. They host events throughout the academic year to support each other through university, while also hosting additional training, qualifications and guest speaker events. They organise fundraising activities, raising money for the society and charities important to their members. Events have included:

- Peanut Ball training course
- Biomechanics for Birth training course
- Leah Hazard Guest Speaker workshop
- Simba Bereavement workshop
- Applicants Evening event for prospective students
- Coffee, Cake and Catch Up events, cold water swimming, Christmas party, graduation ball and other social events

Awards:

- Winner UK Student Midwife of the Year: <https://uwsalumni.org/2026/03/11/dedicated-midwife-recognised-with-prestigious-award/>
- Shortlisted for National Union of Students Society of the Year 2024
- Winners of Scotland Maternity and Midwifery Festival Student Midwife Trailblazer Award 2023
- Winners UWS Students Union Society of the Year 2023

Students Union news stories:

- Events: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/news/article/6013/Midwifery-Society-celebrate-end-to-a-successful-term/>
- Fundraising: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/news/article/6013/Midwifery-Society/>

Aims of interviews

- Highlight what the society have achieved
- Explain how their success has been possible
- Evidence the impact of this
- Show why the society is important to students’ university experience
- Identify how this can be replicated on other courses



Interview responses

The Students' Union Societies & Engagement Team Leader conducted 10 interviews with:

- 4 x individual society committee members
- 3 x groups of ordinary society members (one for each year group on the course)
- 2 x individual lecturers
- 1 x the Director of the Royal College of Midwives in Scotland (RCM facilitate a support network for the three Student Midwifery Societies at Scottish universities)

A selection of key quotations from the interviews, providing an overview of the main themes highlighted across the interviews:

Committee member responses:

What do you think have been the main successes of the society this academic year? Why have they been successful?

- "The 1st years have been really engaged. We put a lot of work into contacting them before they started, inviting them into the community before the academic year started and I think that has really helped with keeping them engaged throughout the year"
- "they bring people together like as well as people in the cohort that you might not get to meet, bring people together from other cohorts like sharing things that you've learned"
- "Engagement. It speaks volumes the fact that we've run a few things for 3rd years this year and the attendance has been really good, where the attendance in normal classes isn't necessarily as good"
- "Because we asked people what they want. Not just putting things on that we think they want"
- "Making people feel welcome and included and safe and able to ask questions... People are able to come to the society with whatever's on their mind and I think that creates a really positive environment of openness and people feel that they are treated compassionately"
- "the support network for ourselves"

What's been the most challenging part of your role in the society? Why challenging?

- "juggling the society commitments with university, placement, family commitments, it's quite difficult, but it's definitely worth it. Like when you put on that event and you've like sacrificed things for it and everyone enjoys it and you're like, yeah, that's like why you do it!"
- "Workload. But there's always someone that can pick it up. We're busy at different times... It's never too much work for anyone because we all split the workload"
- "Getting people to do stuff... There's so many of us and we shouldn't really have to rely on one or two people"
- "The mixed messages that come from the uni"

What does the committee do to help and encourage students to engage in the society and its activities?

- "At the start of term we go out to speak to the 1st years, in one of the lectures, and present what the society has done in the past, who we are, what we do, membership joining etc. Then ask them what they want done this year, what they're interested in... Saying we're here for you. We're going to plan what you want us to plan"

- “We put messages on Aula. We put things on social media. Just finding out what people actually want to do in doing that really helps people attending and supporting us”
- “We ask people what they want... We structured our year based on that feedback”
- “Early introduction, feedback, engagement, presence throughout the year”
- “I would say social media probably the biggest tool for communication”

What impact has your involvement in the society had on your university course?

- “I wouldn’t have got the same fulfilment from my course if it hadn’t been for the society. 100%”
- “It’s helped, definitely helped my confidence and over the past few years and it’s really, really rewarding”
- “Oh my goodness. It’s been amazing. It has been stressful. However, I am going to walk away from uni knowing I gave it absolutely everything, and the society has facilitated that”
- “I’m going to cry. I’ve got a team of supporters who are amazing. I feel so fulfilled in the society and doing things for other students and seeing it all come together. You’re just so proud of the work that we do, like people genuinely benefitting from these things. Whether it’s enhancing your knowledge as a midwife... seeing other people being empowered in their practice, knowing that I’ve been part of the team that’s arranged that and seeing people going forward and bring that out to women and families that they care for. You can’t count that. It’s hugely rewarding for me.”
- “I’m going to cry... It’s been beyond all expectations... Just the really lovely support network. I think I’d feel quite lonely and lost without them”

How does the society work with university staff to achieve your aims?

- “There’s a couple of members of staff who are our biggest cheerleaders and will try and help us out in any way we can”
- “Some staff are very helpful and keen to support the society in terms of scheduling time within their teaching time to have us come and speak to students”
- “We’ll have a look at the timetables with the lecturers to see when is the best time to run events”
- “Some of the lecturing staff have been amazing. They support us hugely. They alter timetables to enable us to facilitate the things we’re doing. They put things out on Aula... It’s very much hit or miss. We either get amazing support or none... I would love it if we had more of a voice at the table... If we could sit down with staff and say here’s what we’ve got planned, here’s what you’ve got planned, we could work together better”
- “There definitely could be more awareness from the teaching staff about the society’s role in engagement... I think some staff are a bit more like ‘why are you doing this?’”

How does the society work with the Royal College of Midwives to achieve your aims?

- “They’ve given us a bit of funding and have come along to any events... They have got the wisdom and expertise of how a union works... It’s really good to be in this community with the other two societies in Scotland. We can see what they’re doing and give each other support”
- “I think it’s good to start that relationship now with when you’re at uni with people who are going to support you should you need them”

How could the society be better supported to achieve its aims?

- “I think from the union point of view I don’t think we could be better supported. I feel like the union are constant cheerleaders for the society.”
- “I do think the Midwifery teaching staff could be a little bit more engaged”
- “More staff buy in. And a lottery winner!”

- “You could always say we could have more funding but the union do have funding which is always there”

What is the most important benefit you have gained from being part of the Midwifery Society?

- “My wee group of people”
- “I’ve got the most amazing group of friends now that are from such diverse backgrounds and if it hadn’t been for the society I wouldn’t necessarily have been mixing with. The support that they give me is what allows me to continue to do what I’m doing. And I know that’s an ongoing thing even when the society ends, they’ll still have a huge influence in my career”
- “Friendship and support and confidence. Yeh. A bit of self-belief”
- “A really good support network”
- “Just the girls. Knowing that there’s someone there who has your back and that you can chat to and speak to. And equally, in some ways, skills development, because you can do something outside of your comfort zone knowing that you have people there to support you and do it with you.”

Ordinary society member responses:

How did you feel when you first started your university course?

- “Terrified”
- “A bit scary”
- “I still kind of feel like a fish out of water. I don’t think I’ll ever shake the imposter syndrome”
- “I was also terrified... I was like, oh my goodness, what have I done. Very apprehensive”
- “Having not been in education, I’m a mature student, coming into a big building like this, that was scary. Not knowing what to expect, not knowing what to do”
- “I was really excited. Grateful that I was finally there”
- “It was very exciting and I was looking forward to just getting to know other people that shared the same interests and just getting started.”

Why did you get involved in the Midwifery Society?

- “I hadn’t been in education for a while. I’d been in college but this was totally different. Coming into something so big and so intense and when you know that for the next three years the work that you’ve given yourself is going to be so hard to juggle, just knowing that there was a group of people that you can go and confide in... we always say on our course that we could have the best friends in the world but none of our friends are going to understand what we’re going through. Nobody apart from the people we’re doing this with will understand how we feel and what’s happening. So to have that big group of people who also feel the same way, it’s just like a big random family that you could join and everyone was just like, I get you.”
- “It’s really nice to get everyone together from different periods of their life. You know everyone’s in different areas and it’s been lovely to see everybody sort of just gel together and no matter what background, age, whatever. And I think we can all agree we’ve made friends for life and doing this course, I think it’s shared trauma where we’ve bonded beautifully that it’s been a really supportive cohort and I’ve certainly found it anyway. I feel like you can approach anybody and everyone’s happy to help and that’s really nice.”
- “The people who run it are so welcoming”

- “The Leah Hazard event. They said it was £5 or free for members, so I thought I’d join and see what happens!”

What did the society committee do to make you feel welcome and supported?

- “You could go and ask them questions and they would be like, ‘how can I help? We’ve been there before’. It’s that peer to peer support”
- “They were offering to provide that support as a person to go to and just giving us a bit of information on what to expect. That kind of sold it for me. One of the early sessions they did was ‘what to put in your placement bag’. I know that sounds a really basic thing but if I wasn’t for the event how would I know that? So just having a wealth of information who’ve had the experience before you”
- “I feel like the society has been really good at kind of voicing concerns and taking them forward”
- “The Instagram where you can see the photos of the committee, so you can put a face to a name”
- “The president messages everyone and feels like our pal. Everyone who runs the society is so amazing”
- “Everybody is lovely. And approachable”
- “There’s a real sense of lifting each other up”
- “It brings people together. Makes you have friends for life. Everyone’s there to help each other. We’re all in it together”

What do you think have been the main successes of the society this academic year? Why have they been successful?

- “In the first year they asked us what events we want and took that into consideration for future things. So knowing your audience. Knowing they’ve been there so knowing what they’ve needed and making sure future groups get it”
- “Asking us ‘what do you want from us and what can we do to make this journey a bit easier and better?’”
- “Knowing that they actually listen to you... Knowing that you’re being listened to by people who have been where you are”
- “It’s good to know that they’re feeling that as well. I’m not alone”
- “The compassionate midwifery event. They just got it so right. The right person at the right time, before we went out on placement. To give us that confidence and encouragement to be yourself, and a good reminder of why you’re here. They have that knowledge and information already because they’ve been there, they’ve been through it, so they know when to do events that matter”
- “The International Day of the Midwife event. That was fantastic as any conference I’ve been to”
- “They’ve done so much. It’s unbelievable. They created a podcast this year which has been really successful. It’s on Spotify. Loads of people have been tuning into it and it just gives a wee insight into the midwife life which is good for the first years in the cohort who like at that point hadn’t been out on placement.”

What’s been the most challenging part of your university experience so far?

- “Being a mum to two young children and trying to juggle”
- “Juggling being a mum and uni and placement life”
- “Keeping thinking ‘am I good enough?’ ‘do I deserve this spot?’ That lack of confidence in your own ability”
- “The biggest challenge has been losing some of the joy of placements due to assessments”

What impact has your involvement in the society had on your university course and experience?

- "Being at the Applicant's Night. I was there in my uniform, talking to that person that I was a year before. I felt a bit more like, I can be here. It helped me believe. I'm a student midwife!"
- "Having like-minded people to talk though the exact same stuff I'm going through that they have"
- "I think I'm not the most outgoing, friend making person and I think because I've been to several events, I've spoken to people that I probably wouldn't have approached otherwise, which has been really nice. It's helped me to branch out a bit and try and make some friends and sort of settle in, especially when we're not always in uni. If we're online, although it's hard to get to know people."
- "Making that connection between the different year groups and being able to kind of like gain advice and experience from them as being like, completely invaluable."
- "we've got a big group chat, if people have been struggling and saying, oh, I don't get this and then about 10 other people say, oh, I don't get it either. The society and the student reps have been good to say. 'Right. Ok well let's put a wee poll. See how many people don't understand it, and then we'll take it further to the lecturers.' And in the challenging times you need people to speak up for you, sometimes if you don't think you can speak up for yourself, it's good to know the reps and the society that will be 'Right. OK, well, let's sort this.'"

How could the society be better supported to help improve students' university experience?

- "More promotion of it... Here are your ready made friends!"
- "Encourage people to be part of it"
- "Well we could have much more money couldn't we"
- "More money, more opportunities. Money to help cover events... They can be expensive... It's just not possible for everyone to access that even with the hard work that the society are doing already"

What is the most important benefit you have gained from being part of the Midwifery Society?

- "I probably wouldn't have immersed myself in my uni journey without the society"
- "It is just a total sense of: you're one of us. It's lovely."
- "A feeling of belonging. To know that we share the same passions and you can speak to everybody and you're heard and supported and not judged"
- "It's that sort of find your tribe thing. Sometimes that's hard, but I feel like with the Midwifery Society, the people who go along to events, do you know, they are all like me, and that's quite nice."
- "From meeting people in the society, chatting throughout the full three years of struggles, the good times, bad times, I think it builds confidence because you know you're not alone. You know there's other people."
- "For me, it's the sense of belonging. You know, I just feel like you know where they've done really well at creating that lovely environment that's, you know, got a bit of camaraderie, got a bit of sort of tutoring and support, but also, they've got your back."
- "You feel like you're part of something. And everyone wants to feel like they're part of something"

Academic staff responses:

What do you know about the Midwifery Society and its role at UWS?

- “They’ll do welcome events. Once they start the programme they’ll do coffee, cake and catch up events, so I suppose it’s pastoral support that they’re offering”
- “What I am particularly proud of was that they have an overview of what the current students are looking for, so they will put out surveys about “what are you interested in?”, “What events can we put in place for you?” but they also get involved in campaigning, so for recruitment events that we have and for offer holder sessions, the Midwifery Society have an activity alongside it, so they really are ambassadors for UWS and they’re very much ambassadors for the midwifery programme as well.”
- “They’re all going to be in the same profession, so this starting off building your network at that stage is phenomenal.”
- “I know that it’s student-led, so from an academic point of view we don’t have a huge amount to do with organising the events or the support of it.”

What are the main challenges in supporting students? Why?

- “there’s a lot of students and not a lot of us in the team and we have a lot of new staff in our team, so they are growing and developing and they’re going to have to focus on the academic side of things, so trying to focus on what can feel like extra-curricular activities can be quite a challenge.”
- “Sometimes I think it’s about understanding the correct routes for things. You know like a lot of our Midwifery Society people are also class reps as well and it’s about them understanding which hat they’re wearing and which activity fits in where. If students have got concerns, that shouldn’t go to the society, that should come to the class reps. The class reps should then take that to the appropriate places etc. So I suppose that’s a bit of a challenge.”
- “At time’s a bit of a challenge. And capturing everything. And money. Money’s always a challenge.”
- “the ratio of staff to students”
- “for example, I’ve got just under fifty students attached to me, so building that relationship with those students, a kind of pastoral support, I find that quite challenging”

What are the main challenges in encouraging students to engage with the course and available support? Why?

- “I think if we continue to do more face to face teaching that will help but I also think we need to make sure we offer a hybrid approach so that those students who live quite far away, or have challenges with childcare, or access to travel, then we need to be mindful of that.”
- “When you’ve got someone who’s highly motivated in the class, you’ll get everybody wanting to step up to that. You know it’s the highest common denominator. You see people stepping up and they can be the driver for helping to make that work. So I think it’s incumbent on us as lecturers to capture that enthusiasm in the class and make sure that you are there to support them and nurture them and guide them.”
- “One of the big things for us is a number of our students travel quite far, so they’ve got used to being able to stay at home and still have a session. Whereas, we’re trying to get them back onto campus.”

What do you think have been the main successes of the society this academic year?**Why have these been successful?**

- “The society is about midwifery. And it’s about how can they support the students to become midwives, who will ultimately help and support the women and the families that they care for. And I think that’s tangible throughout everything that they do.”
- “I think it’s visibility. They’re hugely visible. They’re almost branded aren’t they? You can recognise them. You know who they are. They’ve got their sweaters.”
- “if you ask them to engage they will engage”
- “One of the biggest successes is that it’s passing through the three cohorts.”
- “They have won a number of awards this year, so I suppose that would be one thing but I think it’s the teamwork that’s probably the biggest for me.”
- “Maybe with the events that they’ve had, they’ve made an effort to get to know the other cohorts? I don’t know.”

What impact does involvement in the society have on students’ university course and experience?

- “I think it gives them all of the skills that they need to become successful midwives in the future. So they learn about navigating challenging conversations, about prioritising workload. They get experience of leadership of planning, developing ideas, bringing things into fruition, using unique approaches, taking different approaches, flexibility. If I was an employer and I was seeing what somebody had been active in the Midwifery Society I would love these skills in my workforce.”
- “that passion for midwifery. They’re going to carry that on, because I think they’re all in the society because they’re passionate. And they want to support the wider network but they want to make a difference.”
- “A sense of belonging and finding your people. Finding your support network. The people who understand the highs and lows. And I think the students find that in each other because they’re going through this journey together.”

How do you work with the society to achieve your aims?

- “I think our aims are always going to be student success and building people who are ready for the workforce, so people are going to graduate university and go into midwifery with the right kind of morals and values”
- “I just have an ongoing working relationship and visibility and I’m open access. If they want support, I give it. If I seek something from them, they support me. I don’t know that there’s like a magic answer to that. What I can say is that if someone asks for help, I’ll help them. And if I ask for help, they’ll help me. And I think that responsiveness is really important.”
- “I don’t work with the society. Well, I think actually what I’ve realised this year, I think we probably could do a few things together. Maybe we could have joined up and made bigger events, or a slightly different event, so I think working together would probably be quite helpful.”

How could the society be better supported to achieve its aims?

- “I know the university has extra recognition for volunteering. Maybe they could exit with an additional award at the awards ceremony. Like a distinction but not a distinction. That kind of thing. It would be nice for it to be more noted.”
- “I think everything comes down to money.”

How could you be better supported to create a sense of belonging and community for Midwifery students at UWS?

- “In my UWS workplan I don’t think they give any value to this. You know it’s all very much scripted and calculated. I don’t think there’s anything in the job plan that says, you support the students. It’s very much you teach this module, it’s this many credits, and you’ve got this many students, that’s therefore that many hours, that’s this percentage of your workload. There is no kind of recognition for the added extra. I am a link for the Midwifery Society but I do that because it brings me joy, because I love to see students succeed and I think that I see them succeed through the society. And I see what the society does for the community of students. If it was recognised within the workplan. If somebody said you have an hour a week to support the Midwifery Society, I’d quite like that.”

Royal College of Midwives Director responses:

What role do you have in supporting the Midwifery Society?

- “These are the folk we want to realise have a voice. They are able to influence things. They are able to bring changes. So they’re our biggest asset. They’re the future. So if we’re not involved with them we’re missing a trick.”
- “We are there as a resource they can tap into.”

How does the society access support from RCM?

- “We come in and speak to all students in 1st year but we’re also available for events”

What are the main challenges facing midwifery students during their university courses? Why?

- “The fact that they are not getting the same student experience as most students would. They are working full time. They don’t get that long holiday time. They’re quite financially unstable. They don’t have that typical student experience. They don’t have that same student identity, which is a joy for many people to have.”

What do you think have been the main successes of the UWS Midwifery Society this academic year? Why have these been successful?

- “The president has been phenomenal. She is very good at advocating for students and accessing the right places to do that.”
- “The society have been putting on events for people who haven’t even joined the university yet. They’re bringing their members in before they’re even coming onto the course”

How could the society be better supported to achieve its aims?

- “I think the lecturers here are very good at supporting the society. It feels like they’ve very much bought into it as well, and see the value of it.”
- “There’s been a couple of times where there’s obviously been slight differences in opinion in what the society should do and what the university should do but they appear to have been navigated. So I suppose it’s that ability to advocate for the student society if they feel something’s important and the students want it.”

Do you have any other thoughts on the role of midwifery societies at universities?

- “I think it’s essential. The student society is growing their ability to speak up for themselves and being confident about doing that. We see many students with wonderful ideas, they go into the profession and they lose their voice. And that’s the last thing we want. We want them to keep that voice. If they learn at university that you can influence, you can use your voice, and it’s not always someone else’s responsibility, then you’ve got that ability to do it for yourself.”

Findings

Student Responses:

Really positive view on how it has impacted their university experience:

- Helps them feel welcome, settled in and overcome fears of university
- Peer support that staff cannot provide
- Chances to learn more than is possible for the course to deliver
- Important connections for their career/life beyond their degree
- Personal development
- Students were all quite emotional when giving responses. It clearly means a lot to them

Reasons for success:

- Strong, determined leadership with passion for supporting and involving others
- As part of the course induction, the society committee asked students what they wanted help with
- Created opportunities to get to know each other and understand that peer support is available
- Contact was made before students start their course (applicants evening, social media)
- Social media management played an important role
- Welcoming and relatable committee who can offer peer support that staff cannot

Challenges:

- Time management
- Working as a team/getting input from others

Views on university/academic staff:

- Staff support is mixed. Some staff offer great support. Others do not seem interested
- Very dependent on individual staff
- High ratio of students to staff for the course
- Extra support would be helpful
- Would be good to work together more to integrate plans and events
- Would like more opportunities to help the society engage with new students

Academic staff responses:

- Positive views on impact the society has on students, particularly with peer support and preparing them for life after university
- Difficult student to staff ratio for the course and challenges for building engagement with students
- Unsure of what the role of the society is
- Wary of it having too big a role

- Some confusion on the society overlapping with student rep role
- Society events can sometimes be in competition with staff led activities
- Society activity is being conducted out of staff control
- See benefits of supporting the society
 - Working together
 - Creating opportunities for people to get to know each other
 - Need to have money or allocated staff time to make this possible

Royal College of Midwives staff responses:

- Gave external perspective on challenges that students face while at university
- Highlighted the positive impact the society and involvement in it can have on students once they graduate

Summary of findings

- The society is essential for creating a positive university experience and peer support
- It is not possible for staff to provide peer support in the same way
- This helps students gain as much as they can from university and prepare them for future employment
- With the right support, the society can make students feel immediately welcomed into university and encouraged to engage with their course
- There is a desire from both staff and students to work together more
- Staff support currently relies on personal choices of individuals to give their time to this
- Staff are already stretched and time is not allocated for this

Impact of peer support and student-led activity on university experience

The Director of The Royal College of Midwives highlighted the difficulty for midwifery students is that they do not receive a typical university experience because of placements, no summer break and the fact that many have families and caring responsibilities. Lecturers spoke about the challenge of low staff numbers, students living far from campus, balancing online and in person teaching, and the impact these all have on student engagement. However, it is clear that many students are very engaged with the course, because of the society. A lot of them also have a really fulfilling university experience, because of the society.

"I wouldn't have got the same fulfilment from my course if it hadn't been for the society. 100%."

"The student society is growing their ability to speak up for themselves and being confident about doing that. We see many students with wonderful ideas, they go into the profession and they lose their voice. And that's the last thing we want. We want them to keep that voice. If they learn at university that you can influence, you can use your voice, and it's not always someone else's responsibility, then you've got that ability to do it for yourself." (Royal College of Midwives Director)

What is clear throughout the interviews is that a large part of the reason for their success, and the reason why the society is important, is that it is student-led. Students can provide peer support in ways that is not possible for staff. Events receive better attendance than some which are part of the curriculum because they are student-led, giving a sense of ownership. They gain significant benefits from this student-led involvement.

"Being at the Applicant's Night. I was there in my uniform, talking to that person that I was a year before. I felt a bit more like, I can be here. It helped me believe. I'm a student midwife!"

The success comes from the committee being very welcoming and accessible to students. It is clear that the society is somewhere they can go for support.

"Just the girls. Knowing that there's someone there who has your back and that you can chat to and speak to. And equally, in some ways, skills development, because you can do something outside of your comfort zone knowing that you have people there to support you and do it with you."

Their events, particularly their Applicants' Evening for prospective students, and their social media give students the opportunity to engage with the society before they start their course. Welcome events as part of the induction process at the start of term are used to ask students what they want and need, which then forms the basis of the society plans for the year. This structure embeds the idea and understanding of peer support at the beginning of their university experience.

"It's good to know that they're feeling that as well. I'm not alone."

Strong leadership from committee members is an essential part of the ongoing development of the society. Those who have made the decision to be actively involved in running the society speak passionately about how important this has become to them.

"I'm going to cry... It's been beyond all expectations... Just the really lovely support network. I think I'd feel quite lonely and lost without them."

"Oh my goodness. It's been amazing. It has been stressful. However, I am going to walk away from uni knowing I gave it absolutely everything, and the society has facilitated that"

Role of academic staff in supporting the society

Support from lecturers has provided essential framework to facilitate the society. This includes allocating time for society welcome sessions and events. This is especially important for helping the society continue from one academic year to the next. However, there is no structure in place for lecturers to do this as part of their planned work. There is also a lack of consistent understanding of student-led activities and how they fit into the university set up. There is apprehension for giving up control to students.

University support is dependent on individual staff members choosing to give their own time towards this. Those who have done so saw a real value in the society.

"I do that because it brings me joy, because I love to see students succeed and I think that I see them succeed through the society. And I see what the society does for the community of students. If it was recognised within the workplan. If somebody said you have an hour a week to support the Midwifery Society, I'd quite like that."

Conclusion

University and Students' Union staff do not really have to understand what students want or need. We also do not have to know how to provide this. What we need to do is have structures in place to give students space and time (and maybe some money) to take the lead on what is important to them. Then we should leave it up to them (and trust them) to do the rest. Academic staff highlighted the need for "pastoral support" and the challenges they have in providing this. However, they also recognized the success the society has in providing this "pastoral support".

There are clear benefits to facilitating this at the start of the academic year to help students settle in and feel welcomed and reassured. It also helps reinforce the importance of a student-led university experience from the start.

- If there is an existing academic society for a course, or a society with an overlapping interest (eg. Film Society for Filmmaking course), they could be allocated a session to lead as part of the course induction. The Paramedic Society have been given this opportunity since 2023, which results in almost every first year student joining during their induction.
- Where there is not a relevant society then the session could be given to final year students to share their experiences and give their advice. Everyone likes to be asked to share what they have learnt, so there should not be hesitation in offering this opportunity to them. This would help embed the idea and understanding of peer support, which would increase the potential of an academic society being established.
- Students' Union staff are available to assist students with planning and facilitating sessions.

None of these ideas are new or require much thought, planning or creativity. Hopefully the Midwifery example highlights the passion that students and have staff for their courses. It shows the value of student ownership and peer support, and how these contribute towards empowering them to maximise their student success.

- If the university wants to create a sense of belonging and community, then "extra-curricular" activities cannot be viewed as an optional extra.
- Academic societies should be viewed as a key platform to work in partnership with students to increase engagement and encourage them to make the most of the opportunities available to them.
- There is a need to embed an understanding across UWS staff on what societies are, what they can do, and the role of UWS and Students' Union staff in supporting them.
- Time, space or funding need to be allocated to facilitate student-led activities.
- Trust needs to be placed in students to decide what is important to them and to take the lead on making this possible.

Full guidance on how academic staff can support societies can be found on the Students Union website: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/societies/guidance/>