Union Forum Minutes

18:00 – 19:00, Tuesday 13 October 2026

Membership

Union President	Nicoelle Ocampo	NO
VP Voice	Waleed Shaikh	WS
VP Activity	Mimi Dias	MD
VP Support	Jenny Tan	JT
VP Community	Amber Dobrzanski	AD
Education Officer	Jess Gill	JG
Equity and Inclusion Officer	Patrick (Aung Phyo)	PP
Societies Officer	Brihitika Dev	BD
Team Surrey Officer	Jessica Swanston	JS
Belonging Officer	Charlotte Rutter	CR
Nightlife Officer	Amirah Musadique	AM
Peer Support Officer	Abbie Fluck	AF
Wellbeing Officer	Chloe Beynon	CB
Student Voice Coordinator (Networks)	Victoria Wiltshire	VW
Student Attendees	2	

Agenda

1	Introductions, apologies for absence, ground rules	18:00	NO
For Discussion			
2	Presentation of the Annual Report 2025-26	18:05	NO
3	Officer Updates- • President • VP Voice & Voice Zone • VP Support & Support Zone • VP Community & Community Zone • VP Activity & Activity Zone	18:15	All Officers
4	University Mental Health Charter*:* *Updates & Opportunities to get involved*	18:40	JT
5	**Topic of Discussion:** Renewal & Review of Union Policies - *RAG Charity Selection Policy*	18:45	AD
Other Matters			
6	Any other business	18:55	NO

Apologies

No apologies noted.

Presentation of the Annual Report 2025-26

NO presented a summary of the Union's Annual Report 2025–26 on behalf of the Union team, noting that the full report is available on the Union website and that a link would be shared here. NO encouraged attendees to read the full Annual Report for more detail. NO invited questions and comments on the Annual Report; none were raised in the room or online.

Officer Updates

President – NO

Since starting as Union President, NO has focused on turning their manifesto into practical action, with an overarching vision of making Surrey "a home away from home" where students feel supported, represented and able to succeed. Five priority themes for the year:

1. Education shaped by student feedback
2. Student-led wellbeing
3. Student-centred campus experience
4. Fostering connection and belonging
5. Preparing students for life after university

Welcome and Community-building:

- Supported Welcome Week and Freshers' Fair to help students connect with clubs and societies.
- Introduced "We Are Surrey" to celebrate students' backgrounds, courses and experiences, with plans for student testimonials and society collaborations.

Cost of living:

- Secured an agreement with University catering to redistribute surplus food to students, prioritising those facing financial hardship.
- Aims to have this fully visible and running through the Community Hub by November.

Employability:

- Promoting and further developing the Destination Success programme and website to "level up" the offer, increase numbers of trainers and participants, and focus on power skills for students.

Safety, accessibility and campus improvements:

- Raised issues with University management around campus lighting, underpass improvements, accessibility and late-night transport.
- Exploring proposals for portable charging facilities in key student buildings.

Student voice and representation:

- Representing students at Council, Senate and executive board meetings.

- Sharing student feedback and Freshers' Week outcomes with senior management (e.g. over 6,000 attendees at Freshers' Fair and high website traffic).
- Positive feedback from students on Freshers' Week.

VP Voice & Voice Zone – WS

Course Reps and academic representation:

- Developed a new Course Rep feedback platform in preparation for the shift to SAPF, replacing the previous SSLC system.
- Updated Course Rep training materials and prepared Head Reps to become SAPF coaches.
- Emphasis on the new system being developed in-house so it can be improved quickly based on feedback.
- Strong Course Rep nominations this year (approx. 350), attributed to increased outreach.

Networks and leadership:

- Record number of applications for network leader roles (around 200 applications).
- High-quality candidates made selection challenging.
- Communications for networks are being refreshed with a new, more vibrant and consistent brand.
- "Union 2 U" outreach project launched to increase visibility of the Union and connect with students where they are (on campus and in schools).

Outreach and engagement:

Union 2 U aims to:

- Raise awareness that the Union is the largest representative body for students and an independent charity.
- Encourage more students to connect with the Union and understand available services.
- Use stalls and outreach events, staffed by sabbatical and part-time officers, to gather feedback and promote opportunities.

School-level outreach underway, including:

- Work with the medical school and School of Health Sciences to resolve room-booking issues.
- Engagement with GSA students and off-campus schools to improve connectivity with the Union.

Officer team:

WS highlighted the work of Education Officer Jess (JG) and Equity and Inclusion Officer Patrick (PP), noting their strengths and collaboration on equality and course rep initiatives.

Education Officer – JG

- Supporting WS with Course Rep nominations and administration; pleased with the high number of nominations.
- Addressing issues with the attendance system (e.g. attendance not being logged correctly) and delays in processing student requests via the Hive.

Priorities for the year:

- Assessment and feedback: improving transparency around marking and ensuring feedback helps students improve.
- Communication and consultation: pushing for students to be consulted before decisions are made, not only afterwards.
- Support for disabled and neurodivergent students.
- Helping students balance Union involvement, university work and other commitments.

Equity and Inclusion Officer – PP

- Stepped down from role as LGBT society President and now working with Jodie (Union) and Luke (SSP) on their interim transgender policy on casual sports, currently an ongoing process.
- Recently co-organised a successful LGBTQ+ celebration event with the University, with around 275 attendees and involvement from Union societies; event well received and may continue next year.

Accommodation and international support:

- Acknowledged challenges engaging with the accommodation team but remains committed to raising issues.
- Exploring ideas to support students from countries in crisis, including a "one-stop-shop" website with information on accommodation and support.

VP Support & Support Zone - JT

Surrey Weekends:

- Relaunched "Surrey Weekends", a campaign originally started as a PTO project.
- Aim: tackle student loneliness by encouraging clubs and societies to run free taster sessions every weekend.
- Around 10 Surrey Weekends events already booked, with regular Instagram promotion.
- Sessions are free and also promote societies by featuring them on JT's social media.

Partnership with Beat (eating disorder charity):

Working with Beat in two main ways:

- Producing a video showcasing current support for students with eating disorders and plans for improvement.
- Developing training and awareness for staff and students.

Collaborating with Surrey Sports Park to provide specialist training for front-facing staff on recognising signs of over-exercise and eating disorders and signposting students appropriately.

Study pods:

- New study pods installed in several locations (e.g. first floor of the library, lecture theatre building, with more planned for Senate House and AX building).
- Intended for individual use, such as phone calls or quiet study, without needing to book a full group study room.
- JT oversaw installation at the start of their VP Support term.

Community garden:

- Promoting awareness of the student community garden near the Roundhouse/ International House area.
- Running events such as palette-painting sessions and planning a chalk-drawing workshop in Week 5 (Wellbeing Week).
- Additional signage being installed to increase visibility.

Wellbeing Officer – CB

Priorities for the year:

- Strengthening the Wellbeing Champions scheme and improving newsletters.
- Encouraging students to complete forms recognising when they have helped others, both for data and positive recognition.
- Increase engagement with Wellbeing Champions compared with previous years.
- Build links with GSA Wellbeing Coordinators and ensure they receive appropriate training.

Interested in supporting JT with Surrey Weekends activities.

Peer Support Officer – AF

Priorities for the year:

- Improving communication and coordination between support services, including Nightline.
- Raising the profile of peer support and volunteers.

Also plans to support JT with Surrey Weekends and Wellbeing Week.

VP Community & Community Zone – AD

Freshers' Week:

- Over 100 volunteers signed up as Freshers' Angels to support student move-in and events.
- Volunteers remained active throughout the week (campus tours, events, general support).
- Campus tours attracted over 320 students, with positive feedback on the student-led format.

Belonging events:

Over 2,000 tickets issued and around 9,000 student attendances (with many students attending multiple events).

Nightlife:

Over 11,200 tickets sold, up 110% on last year.

Current and upcoming work:

- Cost of Living Week with a range of events (e.g. kilo sale, film screenings, Piggy Bank decorating).
- Launching a community pantry to provide food and hygiene parcels for students experiencing hardship, on a needs basis.

Parking and commuting:

- Worked with the University to address parking pressures due to increased student numbers and commuters.
- Secured free parking at the new park-and-ride car park for the first semester to reduce barriers to attendance.

Campus safety:

Involved in deputy head of campus safety interviews to ensure the role is more support-focused rather than punitive, especially around mental health crises.

Nightlife Officer – AM

Three main manifesto goals:

1. **Better nights:** improving quality and variety of existing events rather than simply increasing quantity.
2. **Better value for money:** exploring loyalty schemes, birthday offers and society collaborations while keeping events financially sustainable.
3. **Student voice in events:** creating more opportunities for students to share ideas and feedback (e.g. forms, conversations, working directly with students).

Belonging Officer – CR

- Has begun working with AD on belonging-focused events.
- Reported very strong turnout at a recent event (around 20 tickets sold but had around 80 attendees), indicating high interest in inclusive activities.

Manifesto theme: "Bringing Belonging to You", summarised as:

- With you: ensuring events cater to every group of students, not just one.
- From you: using student feedback to shape events.
- For you: ensuring events feel inclusive and student-centred.

VP Activity & Activity Zone – MD

Freshers' Week and conferences:

- Supported planning and delivery of Freshers' Week, including Freshers' Fest (around 1,000 free burgers) and Freshers' Fair (over 6,000 attendees and stallholders).
- Organised Team Surrey Conference and Societies Conference:
    - Team Surrey Conference achieved full attendance from club representatives.
    - Societies Conference had around 200 attendees.

Wellbeing and inclusion:

- Around 163 Wellbeing Champions trained in collaboration with Craig.
- Relaunched the Black Sports Collective, which included a free barbershop event for students and collaborations with Black Minds Matter and Black Tennis Mentors, offering free therapy and free tennis sessions.

Varsity and representation:

- Planning a new Varsity campaign with Royal Holloway, incorporating themes of inclusivity and belonging.
- MD appointed to a regional student sport role, representing the South-East and ensuring inclusivity in sports.

Trips and STARS criteria:

- Organised multiple Union trips, including Edinburgh and an upcoming trip to Budapest.
- Updated and redesigned the STARS criteria to make them more reflective and engaging for clubs and societies.

Employability Officers:

- Introduced an Employability Officer system for clubs and societies, working with the University's employability team.
- Aim: ensure each faculty-based society has someone focusing on employability opportunities.

Societies Officer – BD

BD recently completed a second round of applications for society roles, and identified issues during interviews where some large societies proposed ideas already in place, suggesting:

- Some societies are not active enough or are unaware of existing opportunities.
- There are many inactive societies (around 186+ societies in total), and this number needs to be reduced or revitalised.

Plans to:

- Work with multiple societies to plan events, scheduling and marketing.

- Encourage more regular and visible society activity.

Team Surrey Officer – JS

Manifesto priorities include stronger student voice and communication.

Changes implemented:

- Separated club and society "standings" into distinct sessions to make them more conversational and less lecture-style.
- Aiming to hold future standings in teaching spaces that better support discussion.

Focus on:

- Simplifying STARS and Colours processes to increase recognition and opportunities.
- Strengthening links with local schools for coaching opportunities.
- Exploring exam-season sports sessions to support student wellbeing.

University Mental Health Charter: *Updates & Opportunities to get involved*

Speaker: JT

- The University is working towards the University Mental Health Charter, overseen by Student Minds.
- The Charter looks at four key areas (learn, support, work and live) and how universities support student and staff mental health across these.
- The University has submitted evidence of current work, alongside a student-led submission coordinated by the previous VP Support and JT.

The process is now in its final stages:

- Student Minds Assessment Team will visit the University to hold a student focus group on **Tuesday 10 November, 10:15–11:30**.
- This is an opportunity for students to share experiences, highlight good practice and identify areas for improvement.
- Participants will receive a briefing and be paid £15 for the hour.

JT encouraged attendees to:

- Take part or nominate others.
- Contact Kath Phillips by Friday 16 October if interested.
- Look out for a summary and Kath's email address, which will be shared in the chat.

Renewal & Review of Union Policies: *RAG Charity Selection Policy*

Speaker: AD

The existing RAG charity selection policy has expired and needs renewal.

AD outlined the previous process:

- Charities submit bids explaining why they should be chosen.
- Sabbatical team shortlists to five.
- Student body votes on preferred charities.
- One charity is selected for a two-year partnership and another for one year, on a rolling basis.

Because the previous process relied on a RAG Chair (an elected officer role that no longer exists), the policy must be updated.

AD sought feedback on:

- Whether the existing process should largely be retained.
- Any changes needed to reflect the new governance structure and ensure transparency.

AD proposed:

- Drafting a revised policy based on feedback.
- Bringing a formal proposal to the November Union Forum for discussion and vote.
- Sharing both the old policy and the proposed new policy with attendees for comment.

Any Other Business

STARS Programme clarification:

CB requested more detail on the STARS programme. MD explained: STARS is an awards framework for clubs and societies. Participation is optional but strongly encouraged as it benefits both societies and students. Criteria include actions such as:

- Attending Union Forum.
- Participating in Belonging Week.
- Maintaining a minimum number of members.

Following STARS can significantly elevate a society's profile and impact. NO added that as a former society president, following STARS criteria helped their society achieve Gold STARS and grow membership. STARS provides a structured guide for planning events, including non-alcoholic and collaborative activities.

Network Leader Training Opportunity:

VW highlighted an opportunity for officers and attendees to get involved in training sessions being developed for network leaders. Training will cover: Presentation skills, advocacy and listening skills and related competencies.Details to be shared in the chat.

Engagement with Union Forum and Union2U:

WS encouraged attendees to:

- Continue attending Union Forums and Voice Forums.
- Approach officers on campus with questions, problems or suggestions.
- Recognise Union Forum as a key space where feedback can drive change.

Destination Success Workshops

NO promoted upcoming Destination Success workshops:

- Sessions run in the early evening (e.g. 17:00–18:30 and 19:00–20:30) on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays over the next three weeks.
- Workshops focus on power skills and are beneficial for part-time officers and students in developing confidence and employability.
- Attendees encouraged to sign up and share with peers.

Club Culture Training – scheduling

JS raised that some students were concerned club culture training was only offered on Wednesdays.

MD responded:

- Wednesday was chosen because lectures typically finish earlier.
- The team is exploring additional dates on other days to increase accessibility.

Future Union Forums and student engagement:

NO emphasised the importance of student voices in shaping Union and University decisions, and also mentioned the upcoming Union Forum on Tuesday 17 November, 18:00–19:00, to be held in-person at the Teaching Block and online. Also plans to offer additional incentives and prizes for in-person attendance.

Officers and PT officers were asked to:

- Promote Union Forum to friends, course mates and networks.
- Help students understand what the Union does and the impact of their participation.

Closing

NO checked for any final questions; none were raised, and then thanked everyone for attending the first Union Forum of the year.

Attendees can contact NO with any topics they would like added to a future agenda.

Next Union Forum: Tuesday 17 November 18:00-19:00 TB01 and online.