

Student Voice Forum

18:30 – 20:00, 27 November, Microsoft Teams Live Events

Membership

Role	Name	Initials
VP Voice (Chair)	Luana Vasconcelos	LV
Provost and Senior Vice-President	Professor Tim Dunne	TD
Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education	Professor Annika Bautz	AB
Interim Chief Students' Officer	Emma Rowsell	ER
Chief Operating Officer	Will Davies	WD

Agenda

Standing Items			
1	Welcome from the VP Voice	18:30 – 18:35	LV
2	Welcome to University Panel & Professor Annika Bautz	18:35 – 18:45	All
Theme 1: Academic Experience			
3	<i>The University has launched a new Code of Practice for Attendance and Engagement. Students report confusion over the attendance monitoring process, and concern around how the new approach will affect them. What will be done to ensure the process is implemented consistently and communicated clearly to students?</i>	18:45 – 18:50	ER
4	<i>Changes have been made this year to overnight Library opening hours, with many students concerned about the lack of available spaces overnight. How is the University responding to this feedback?</i>	18:50 – 18:55	ER
5	<i>Speak Week is ongoing at the Union. In each previous Speak Week campaign, students - especially commuters and those with part-time jobs - called for earlier release of exam timetables and more condensed teaching timetables. What is being done to consider these requests?</i>	18:55 – 19:00	ER, AB
6	Questions from the floor	19:00 – 19:20	All
Theme 2: Academic and Personal Support			
7	<i>The Union's activity is supported by over a thousand voluntary student roles - roles which benefit students' own development. How will the recognition of student leaders be developed under the University's Employability Strategy and restructured Careers team?</i>	19:20 – 19:25	ER
8	<i>During Speak Week, students regularly call for more affordable catering options for diverse dietary needs and student communities. What plans are in place to diversify the University's catering provision?</i>	19:25 – 19:30	WD
9	<i>The University is working towards achieving the Mental Health Charter Award. The Charter recognises some students face additional barriers to positive mental health, such as disabled students facing stress from</i>	19:30 – 19:35	ER

	<i>physical barriers to engaging with support and navigating campus. How will the University ensure mental health support works for all students?</i>		
10	Questions from the floor	19:35 – 19:55	All
Closing			
11	Closing remarks from the VP Voice	19:55 – 20:00	LV

Welcome and Introductions

LV opened the meeting by welcoming all of those in attendance, including University staff members who have joined the meeting to discuss both preset questions and questions submitted via teams. LV also briefly discussed the Speak Week which is taking place at the time of the meeting and highlighted different ways students can get involved with the campaign.

AB introduced herself and her new role to everyone as Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, having previously been the Dean for FABSS.

ER introduced herself as Interim Chief Students' Officer.

WD introduced himself as Chief Operating Officer.

TD introduced himself as Provost and Senior Vice-President.

Theme 1: Academic Experience

Q1. The University has launched a new Code of Practice for Attendance and Engagement. Students report confusion over the attendance monitoring process, and concern around how the new approach will affect them. What will be done to ensure the process is implemented consistently and communicated clearly to students?

ER answered by sharing that she has heard some concerns surrounding this and provided a brief recap on the introduction of My Surrey Engagement. ER stated that there is evidence to suggest that increased engagement through attendance and interacting with the library leads to better outcome, although noted that there are barriers for students having 100% attendance. ER stated that 80% should be the target that students should be aiming for, to have good attendance, although there is the understanding that PSRB courses often require higher attendance. ER Noted that the idea behind the new policy is so that online attendance monitoring is rolled out consistently amongst academics, and that students have the right to ask their academic to provide the code to check-in to class. Overall, the monitoring of attendance means that supportive conversations can be opened up if students aren't attending their classes. ER noted that a small number of students are still struggling to log their attendance online, and that IT are working hard to resolve these issues.

Q2. Changes have been made this year to overnight Library opening hours, with many students concerned about the lack of available spaces overnight. How is the University responding to this feedback?

ER highlighted that the decision to close the library overnight was due to feedback from students surrounding the number of lights on campus overnight, with the Surrey Overnight Scheme aiming to reduce the number of buildings open throughout the night. She feels that

student feedback was clear that the library was not a suitable space to be closed overnight, therefore, a decision was made to re-open the library 24 hours throughout term-time. WD reiterated that the library is a very large building, and that decision was originally made to combat the ongoing climate crisis. WD feels that the University has responded to the feedback given but understands the continued motivation from students to keep developing the University's approach to sustainability.

Q3. *Speak Week is ongoing at the Union. In each previous Speak Week campaign, students - especially commuters and those with part-time jobs - called for earlier release of exam timetables and more condensed teaching timetables. What is being done to consider these requests?*

ER stated that timetabling is a priority to improve, particularly with how commuting students can continue to be supported. She commented that condensed timetabling is being looked at, however due to requirements surrounding teaching spaces, it is not feasible for all courses to be condensed across 2-3 days per week. University colleagues are being asked to consider how programmes are being taught in the spaces given, and where courses can be condensed, they will be. ER continued by commenting that she has queried why exam timetables aren't able to be published earlier, however, after discussions with the timetabling team, it is only feasible for timetables to be shared a week earlier than they already are, due to logistics. ER commented that this will be the goal for the next round of exam timetables, and there is also the aim to produce a block of when students can expect to be sitting exams, eg, a Monday-Wednesday of a set week.

AB included data which shows that an average of 68% of undergraduate students now work, meaning that attending classes 5 days a week isn't always the best layout for students. She commented that the University is working on the majority of courses being scheduled for 3-4 days per week.

Questions from the Floor:

- a. We have received feedback about the new attendance policy, notably that there's a concern that missing lectures is perceived to be from a lack of effort, when in reality, students have things going on that make attendance hard. So, what is the flexibility for those who are genuinely trying, but cannot be there in-person?**

ER discussed that message that has been given to academics is that this is to be a supportive conversation, and the University understands that students have their own schedules and lives. She comments that if conversations are engaged with by students surrounding attendance, these will be taken into consideration.

- b. With lessons that are deemed optional, is attendance still being tracked? And if so, is it fair that optional sessions can have an impact on students' attendance rate?**

ER commented that it is hoped that if the sessions are not optional, that they are not being tracked. There is still work to do around this, as she comments that if the discussion is raised by an academic that a student's attendance is stopping, then a student is able to highlight

that this was due to attendance monitoring at an optional session which they did not attend.

- c. What is the University doing to raise its profile and status as a university in the UK to attract more employers from high level, Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 companies, and what opportunities do you see for strengthening industry links?**

ER highlights the Graduate Future Strategy, which looks at how the university is working to improve its ranking. She discussed that a working group is being formed which looks at how the University works with different employment partners and industries, both locally in Surrey and the UK. Alongside this, the Integrated Employability Review is being developed, which looks at every programme and how employability can be imbedded throughout. TD adds that the University's attractiveness for students is critically related to employment prospects, adding that Surrey is consistently in to top 20 in the UK, with graduate outcomes being in the top 10 in some cases. TD hopes that this continues to be the case, particularly when looking at future roles students may be looking to get.

- d. What is the rationale behind the 3-week turnaround time for marking assessments, even for modules with small class sizes?**

AB comments that this is the time needed for every assignment to be marked by the 1st and 2nd marker, then to be checked thoroughly afterwards. She adds that this is the time needed for the academic and administrative team, and this is the same no matter how large the cohort, to allow for consistency across all courses.

- e. Can there be another group or relaxed study floor or more study spaces to be made available in the library? Group study rooms are the most popular levels and become very cramped during the day.**

WD discussed work that is on-going to see how well different spaces around the campus are used, and if the needs of students are being met. He discussed other multi-purpose study spaces on campus which are useful for students to combat the issue of overcrowding in the group study spaces in the library, eg the Dots, however, there is a question of students are aware of these spaces. He is keen for student input surrounding the project, in order to have a greater collective understanding of students' needs of the campus.

ER added that following the ongoing discussions surrounding the library, there will be a feedback opportunity surrounding space on campus, which she is hoping to develop alongside LV. ER highlighted that there will be QR codes in The Dots, signposting to other Dots if the space is full. ER also discussed the potential of the moving of one of her teams out of the library to open up more study spaces.

Theme 2: Academic and Personal Support

Q1. The Union's activity is supported by over a thousand voluntary student roles - roles which benefit students' own development. How will the recognition of student leaders be developed under the University's Employability Strategy and restructured Careers team?

ER discussed a new Students' Union Volunteering Hub, which falls under the new Strategy. This will be a Digital Employability Hub, previously named Pathways, where students can find and log employability opportunities, which can appear on a student's HEAR Report. ER feels that the Students' Union plays a key part in providing volunteering opportunities to Students.

Q2. During Speak Week, students regularly call for more affordable catering options for diverse dietary needs and student communities. What plans are in place to diversify the University's catering provision?

WD highlights that this theme is mentioned across officer manifestos, and that discussions have taken place on this topic. WD states that his observation on this is that there is a variety on campus in terms of price point and variation, however, he feels that there is work to be done surrounding the variety of coffee price options across different locations on campus. There are advanced discussions for there to be a new Wetherspoons location on campus, which hopes to be able to cater to a variety of dietary requirements.

Q3. The University is working towards achieving the Mental Health Charter Award. The Charter recognises some students face additional barriers to positive mental health, such as disabled students facing stress from physical barriers to engaging with support and navigating campus. How will the University ensure mental health support works for all students?

ER discussed that the University is always looking to evolve their services through feedback from students, through platforms such as the Disability Forum, which has now been morphed into Network. ER discussed how the disability and neuro-inclusion team is streamlining the way that they offer reasonable adjustments to students with straightforward diagnoses, with support such as early induction and quiet hours during welcome week activities and went on to discuss further mechanisms in place which are available to support Disabled students more broadly, including disability training for staff. The continued feedback from students helps prioritise the targeted areas of work within this team.

Questions from the Floor:

- a. Has the university looked into the investment needed to be able to isolate floors in the library, to help give us more options in the future if the issue of library opening times arises again?

WD stated that the University currently looking into the feasibility of this, as part of a wider project which explores having more effective building management systems and controls across building. The aim is to make a digital twin of the campus in order to monitor energy usage and costs from a sustainability perspective, which will then later explore the ability to isolate floors and understanding what generates the carbon load.

- b. Can more be done to ensure that supervision for PGR Students is effective and creates meaningful intellectual stimulation?

- c. TD comments that data suggests that PGR Students are completing their doctorates and are finding employment and research opportunities following their studies. He does recognise that, given the scale of the university, that there will be some cases where students don't feel that they're given the correct supervisor. He encourages students to reach out to their Associate Heads within their School to raise any concerns surrounding supervision, as these interactions are approached in a 'no fault' way, and are simply there to resolve these issues, whether this is discussing any problems which arise or changing a students' supervisor during their studies.
- d. Can we have better maintenance of the recording equipment in lecture theatres, because there have been a number of times where recording equipment hasn't worked, which has caused confusion and stress for students.

WD that there is an ongoing focus for audio and visual support more generally, with the aim for equipment to be working as it should be. He notes that there are a large number of teaching spaces and praises the IT department for their work in managing these spaces. WD highlights the elements which fall into this, firstly ensuring that equipment is up to date and working, secondly that teachers are supported in understanding how to make best use of the equipment, and thirdly that the University are wanting to simplify their set-ups across campus.

AB added that sometimes the University underestimates the usage of the equipment, with it taking 2-3 weeks to refurb equipment, meaning that it is often a case of waiting for a break in teaching to allow for fundamental changes. However, she adds that faults are not being recorded the way they should be and encourages both staff and students alike to ensure that the correct processes are being followed in the monitoring and reporting of faults.

- e. For postgraduate students that are heading to placement, it can feel that they are left to their own devices, as most of the communications surrounding placements are targeted towards postgraduate students. What can be done about this?

ER answered this question generally, as the course of the student asking this was not specified. She notes that the majority of placements are taken between levels 5-6, with there are a relatively small number of cases where, for 2-year postgraduate courses, the 1st year is teaching, and the 2nd year is placement-based. The University has a partnership with a group called 'Twin Group' who provide support for students where this is the case, running a module throughout the teaching period which aims to ready students for placement, developing your CV and provision of support in looking for the placement itself. She understands that placements are extremely competitive and will take this feedback on the support of students back to her team. She notes that some of this work is being transferred into being internal from the University within the Employability Team, a team which students should always feel happy reaching out to in terms of accessing support and relevant sessions to plan for and help find their placement, and comments that she will look into how the marketing for the support provided can be more tailored to Postgraduate Students.

- f. What are the University's plans for increasing accommodation, particularly as there will be an increase in the number of students. What are the plans for currently unused accommodation on Stag Hill?

In reference to the Guildford Court accommodation, WD discusses that this has not been used for a number of years due to the cost needed to run it and to bring it back online. He is optimistic that the University is in a position to address this and is working with colleagues to create a proposal to bring it back online and to use these 200 rooms. WD will bring an update on this matter to the next forum. He then goes on to discuss more broadly about the number of accommodation rooms that the University has for students, and comments that the current aims are to create more accommodation and work with private providers to ensure they are offering a range of price points.

- g. How is the University ensuring there is communication between different schools for students who are doing dual-honours programmes, as there have been issues with exam clashes and missing information. How can we make sure that these students feel part of an academic community?

AB discusses that in an ideal world; students will benefit from both schools' cultures and events. However, she understands that this is not always the case, however issues such as exam clashes should not be happening and hopes that issues are ironed out quickly where this occurs. General university policies apply across the board in order to minimise any major differences in structural approaches to teaching, however cultures can be different. She recognises that different schools should be communicating in order to bridge any of these differences and emphasises that individual issues should be raised with the Programme Leader.

LV discusses that course reps for dual-honours programmes should check-in with the Students' Union for matters such as students understanding which courses they are representing.

- h. Can the University give us sense of where and how the University budget is being allocated? Financial constraints are given as reason for not improving key accessibility services and department funding. Would it be possible to attend a budget meeting or receive a report?

TD answers that the University are constantly looking into ways that they can invest and improve student services and experiences. Such as the discussion with the library which sees a £100,000 investment, some budgetary commitments means that this money cannot be spent elsewhere. All questions of expenditure look at priority which are discussed by colleagues, most notably the Chief Financial Officer Matthew Knight, who works closely with University Leadership. TD suggests leaving the budget setting to these leaders as it can be a fairly complicated process, with the University managing roughly £350 Million, but it doesn't mean that the University has this much to spend, due to required spending within faculties. TD discusses that the University publishes its annual report in December, which details financial statements from the previous year. He encourages students to worry less about

how this money is spent, and instead to focus on what matters most to them with spending, and to communicate this with the University.

- i. What is being done to investigate if there is a wider issue surrounding University culture, given that there has been an increase in report and support cases in the last year.

ER recognises this increase since September, however this is seen as a positive. She comments that Surrey previously had a low level of reporting compared to other Universities, and due to changes in the OfS conditions with the developments to E6 surrounding Harassment and Sexual Misconduct, there was an increase in communication of report and support. ER suspects that the increase in reporting is down to the increased communication, as students and staff realise that situations that happen to them should not be, as expectations have become clearer. ER also discusses the new Academic Freedom and Freedom of Rights bill that was passed through parliament which notably caused conflict. She goes on to discuss the example of Jewish Students feeling under scrutiny due to current global political events, and comments on the response from the Report and Support team, the Religions Beliefs Centre and Campus Security to ensure the ongoing support and safety of students.

- i. What is the University doing to increase the ease of access for disabled and neurodivergent students? A lot of accessible routes take longer, and students face issues such as uneven paving, trip hazards and lack of lighting. Students would like a clear timeframe and commitment to making these improvements surrounding accessibility.

WD comments that there has been progress made on clearer accessibility routes, although that there are restrictions due to the University's location on a hill. The aim is to ensure this access mapped out to students, however, recognises that from the issues raised he is most surprised by the question of lighting, as this is something which is constantly monitored. WD discusses the ongoing work to iron out these trip-hazards resolved, and states that although he cannot commit to a timeline, he can commit to following up with a clearer answer on this.

LV closed the discussion and answering of questions as the meeting ran over time slightly and thanked all of those who contributed to the discussion and the over 100 questions presented during the meeting. She highlights that for any missed questions, these have been made note of, with written answers being sent around after the forum. LV thanked the panel for their answers and contribution to the session.