



# Union Forum

18:30 – 20:00, Tuesday 11 November, Microsoft Teams

## Membership

Role	Name	Initials
Union Chair	Sal Fox (Chair)	SF
Union President	Matt Aikin	MA
VP Voice	Luana Vasconcelos	LV
VP Activity	Kade De Gannes	KDG
VP Support	Sam Buss	SB
VP Community	Amber Dobrzanski	AD
Voice Zone Officers (PTOs)	Alfred Lovesey Heer Patel Jenny Jackson Matt Jarvis Mohammad Faiz Siddiqui	AL HP JJ MJ MF
Support Zone Officers (PTOs)	Lexi Antoniou Zara Shanavaz Julia Sienko Chris Papafiggos	LA ZS JS CP
Community Zone Officers (PTOs)	Baris Aydin Jaden Ogunlade Vihanya Ratnayake Kethan Kotian Hashir Ahmed	BA JO VR KK HA
Activity Zone Officers (PTOs)	Mimi Gunawardena Guatam Kalra Sahil Korabandi Neha Desai Anvita Kadam	MG GK SK ND AK

### Apologies For Absence:

Jenny Tan - Support Zone Officer

### ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION AND/OR APPROVAL

#### Presentation of the 24-25 Annual Report | Matt Aikin

#### Key Achievements

- Union Representation Efforts:

- Engaged in national-level student representation, including meetings with local MP Zoe Franklin
- Presented on behalf of students, contributing to national and local government consultations such as the Renters' Rights Bill
- Redesigned and improved the Union website, to streamline processes like Club & Society Elections and the Union transport booking system.
- Voice Zone:
  - Introduced 'Rep of the Month' to recognise Course Rep achievements.
  - Expanded the Student Equality Network, establishing three new sub-networks focused on Disability, Neurodiversity, Race Equality and International Students.
  - Received over 1,600 Speak Week suggestions.
- Support Zone:
  - Trained over 160 wellbeing champions, providing academic & housing advice to over 3,000 students
  - Launched the improved peer support service 'talk together'
  - Successfully ran Wellbeing Week and Wellfair event
- Activity Zone:
  - Introduced 14 new trips. Sold over 700 tickets and supported 40+ new societies
  - Expanded the free and inclusive sports opportunities
  - Successfully delivered creative showcases such as the Winter Fashion Show and Strictly Come Surrey
- Community Zone:
  - Reintroduced the Lake Bar
  - Facilitated growth in the Community Hub's sustainable, low-cost offerings
  - Transformed several underused spaces and upgraded events in Union venues – received increased engagement at Rubix during Freshers Week

## **Union Priorities | Matt Aikin**

### Priorities For This Academic Year

- *Academic Influence and Engagement* – Focuses on strengthening student satisfaction with the academic experience and ensuring that student feedback is heard.
- *High Quality Campus Experience* – Aims to improve the quality, cost and accessibility of campus services, with particular attention given to improving the Union building and wider social spaces.
- *Student-led Sense of Belonging and Wellbeing* – Centres on supporting student-led communities, strengthening the University Mental Health Charter and reducing barriers to equality of opportunity.
- *Impactful Representation and Advocacy* – Includes efforts to influence national policy, focusing on long-term provision of student housing in Guildford. And initiatives to recognise and reward students who help others through extra-curricular activities.

## **Officer Updates (President) | Matt Aikin**

## Key Activities and Progress:

- Met regularly with the Vice Chancellor and Executive Board to present student feedback and progress manifesto commitments.
- Worked with the VC to increase budgets for sports clubs and transport.
- Chaired a successful VC Q&A.
- Continued discussions regarding the introduction of a Semester 1 Reading Week, with implementation aimed for the next academic year.
- Supported ongoing staff recruitment, including the appointment of new Union team members and student trustees.
- Oversaw the development of the Reusable Coffee Cup scheme, due for launch in Semester 2.
- Worked to increase Union outreach across campus.
- Began reviewing a restructure of Part-Time Officer roles, to be brought forward in the next Surrey Decides.

## Voice Zone Updates | Luana Vasconcelos

### Course Rep Training:

- Delivered in-person course rep training session, with over 200 course reps in attendance.
- Held the first course rep social of the year, with the next scheduled for **20<sup>th</sup> November 2025** during Speak Week.

### By-Elections:

- Held in October, resulting in the election of eight new Part-Time Officers

### Representation:

- Attended Senate and other senior university committees to represent the Voice Zone
- Participated in a Race Equality Charter meeting to discuss issues raised by students during Black History Month.

### EDI Efforts:

- Launched all student-led networks for the year, including Disability & Neurodiversity, International Students and Race Equality.
- Delivered Black History Month events in collaboration with societies
- Marked Disability & Neurodivergent Awareness Month in November and celebrated International Student's Day in the Hive.

### Part-Time Officer Highlights:

- Alfred: Contributed to discussions on improving election delivery and visibility. Raised ideas around reinstating a digital feedback page to show actions taken in response to student concerns.
- Jenny: Launched the Course Rep Digital Noticeboard on Teams. Supported election outreach and engaged in departmental lobbying on exam results.
- Matt: Focused on the needs of commuting students, including exploring dedicated commuter spaces following conversations initiated at the VC Q&A.

- Faiz (report delivered by LV): Recently elected to the Voice Zone. Raised academic concerns within his department and discussed establishing more drop-in style feedback opportunities, alongside increasing Voice Zone presence across campus.
- Heer: Engaged with the Accommodation Team about expanding social spaces and supported initiatives to increase Personal Tutor meetings within Health Sciences.

### **Support Zone Updates | Sam Buss**

#### Highlights & Achievements:

- Delivered a successful Wellbeing Week, offering events and training opportunities.
- Ran WellFair, showcasing a range of internal and external support services.
- Promoted the Union Mental Health Charter and World Mental Health Day in collaboration with the Centre for Wellbeing
- Strengthened partnerships with ThriveWell, the Centre for Wellbeing and the Chaplaincy to expand student support.
- Delivered two Wellbeing Champion training sessions and completed additional training for the Talk Together service, which now operates two nights per week.
- Signed up Student Drug and Alcohol Awareness Week, aiming to promote safer choices.

#### Upcoming Work & Plans:

- Preparing for Disability History Month, working with ThriveWell to deliver creative wellbeing sessions.
- Planning a Transgender Day of Remembrance vigil in collaboration with the LGBTQ+ Society and the Rainbow Network.

#### Part-Time Officer Highlights:

- Lexi: Preparing to launch *The Dancing Cure*, movement-based wellbeing sessions. Developed promotional content, to be shared via the Psychology Society and Union website and Instagram.
- Julia: Developing two Semester 2 initiatives: a Report and Support awareness stall and an advocacy/inspiration event designed to support students preparing for the workplace.
- Zara: Actively involved in Talk Together. Supported Wellbeing Week by attending events, producing social media content, and promoting activities. Working on Support Zone-led student check-ins to discuss wellbeing and gather feedback on wellbeing services.

### **Activity Zone Updates | Kade De Gannes**

#### Highlights & Achievements:

- Launched the initiative *Black Sport Collective*, designed to support Black students in sport while strengthening employability pathways.
- Held two Society & Club Standings.
- Collaborated with the Careers & Employability team on an Employability Forum.
- Continued joint work with the Careers & Employability team to support students finding placements and graduate work.

- Worked closely with clubs and societies to support their campaigns and events.
- Encouraged increased engagement and membership through targeted outreach — particularly within Engineering courses.

#### Upcoming Work & Plans:

- Aims to gather student feedback on how the Careers Team can enhance its services.

#### Part-Time Officer Highlights:

- Mimi: Leading on the *This Girl Can* campaign, aimed at increasing women's participation in sport and creating more comfortable active spaces. Actively building relationships with clubs and societies to strengthen input into Union events.
- Sahil: Partnered with the ESA and Nigerian societies to produce content reflecting on the meaning of Black History Month. Also invited the Presidents and Vice Presidents of these societies to participate in a podcast exploring Black History and other topics.

### Community Zone Updates | Amber Dobrzanski

#### Highlights & Achievements

- Raised concerns with the University about inconsistencies in coffee pricing across campus.
- Confirmed that the Hillside Food Court will extend its opening hours from Semester 2.
- Continued work on the Surrey Overnight Scheme to include areas and buildings on the green route.
- Discussed the introduction of speed bumps in Manor Park
- Supporting the development of a Safe Sanctuary space on campus.

#### Upcoming Work & Plans:

- Housing Fair in collaboration with the Support Zone **25<sup>th</sup> November 2025**

#### Part-Time Officer Highlights:

- Hashir: Engaged with various students to gather feedback, with a particular focus on international and commuter student experiences.

### Topic of Discussion: Library Opening Hours | Sal Fox

The Union Forum discussed recent changes to Library opening hours, which resulted in the Library no longer operating on a 24/7 basis and instead closing between 12:00 am and 8:00 am. It was noted that the Union was consulted late in the decision-making process; however, was able to influence discussions to avoid an earlier 10:00 pm closure. While the University committed to providing alternative overnight study spaces, concerns were raised regarding the suitability, safety and accessibility of these spaces for students.

Students raised a range of concerns regarding the impact of the reduced library hours, including:

- Safety and reliability of alternative study spaces compared to the library
- Impact on commuting students who arrive on campus early or remain late

- Insufficient and inconsistent communication from the University regarding changes
- Accessibility concerns regarding DSE furniture, monitors and printers
- The needs of neurodivergent students who rely on quiet, late-night study environments

It was also highlighted that, while extended opening hours remain in place during examination periods, students across different courses experience assessment deadlines throughout the academic year, limiting the effectiveness of this provision.

Suggestions Raised by the Forum:

- Reinstating 24/7 Library access
- Improving the reliability, safety and security of alternative overnight study spaces
- Introducing a heating system that allows individual floors to be isolated
- Implementing heating controls similar to those used in student accommodation
- Limiting overnight access to one or two floors to reduce security costs
- Introducing random overnight security patrols of all study spaces
- Improving communication and signage around the use of Dot common rooms and alternative study spaces

LV confirmed ongoing meetings with the Library team, mentioning that staff also disagreed with the decision. Feedback from the Forum will be escalated to University senior leadership. The consensus of the Forum was in favour of reinstating 24/7 Library access.

## **CLOSING ITEMS**

### **Any Other Business:**

VP Voice reminded officers to contact her with any additional learning resources or library-related feedback.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and confirmed the next Union Forum meeting will take place on the **9<sup>th</sup> March 2026**.