

Student Voice Forum

18:30 – 20:00, 17 February, Microsoft Teams Live Events

Membership

Role	Name	Initials
VP Voice (Chair)	Luana Vasconcelos	LV
Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education	Professor Annika Bautz	AB
Interim Chief Students' Officer	Emma Rowsell	ER
Chief Operating Officer	Will Davies (<i>apologies</i>)	WD
Executive Dean of FEPS	Bob Nichol	BN

Agenda

Standing Items			
1	Welcome from VP Voice	18:30	LV
2	Welcome to University Panel – NSS Reminder	18:35	AB
3	Welcome to candidates for VP Voice	18:40	LV
Theme 1: Assessment and Feedback			
4	<i>Students have shared that academic staff would benefit from additional training to ensure assessment criteria take students' disabilities and neurodiversity into account. One example raised is neurodiverse students being assessed on eye contact during presentations. Will the University be introducing more training for staff on the importance of inclusive assessment criteria?</i>	18:45	ER AB
5	<i>In light of the increasing availability of Generative AI tools, many Universities are considering how to develop assessments which maintain academic integrity. Considering the value of online assessments, how will the University diversify assessments at Surrey to avoid a return to an over-reliance on in-person exams?</i>	18:50	AB
6	<i>This year, several Rep Wins have been submitted after resolving issues with late or poor-quality assessment feedback. Considering feedback has been a long-standing area for improvement in the National Student Survey, is a new approach needed to prevent continued poor satisfaction with feedback?</i>	18:55	AB
7	Questions from the floor	19:10	All
Theme 2: Inclusive Campus and Support			
8	<i>During Black History Month, students raised concerns about a lack of staff diversity at Surrey. Does the University have plans to improve diversity amongst the pool of both visiting and permanent staff to match our student community?</i>	19:25	WD AB
9	<i>Our International Student Network has shared feedback that it can be unclear what support is available to them, including visas and employability support. Does the University have any plans for a centralised, targeted approach to supporting international students?</i>	19:35	ER AB
10	<i>Disabled students continue to share frustrations about sudden changes to campus accessibility and a lack of communication about fixes for ongoing issues. What is the University doing to resolve long-standing issues and improve communication and transparency around campus accessibility?</i>	19:30	WDER

11	Questions from the floor	19:40	All
Closing			
12	Closing remarks from the VP Voice	19:55	LV

LV Welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained how the session will be run. She explained that the panel, made up of University staff members will be asked set questions, followed by students having the opportunity to submit their own questions. Students are able to submit questions via the teams live event.

LV then introduced the panel for the session, Professor Annika Bautz who is the University's Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education, Emma Rowsell who is the Interim Chief Students' Officer, and Bob Nichol who is Executive Dean of FEPS.

LV then handed over to AB to discuss the NSS (National Student Survey). AB reminded students that the survey is now live and encouraged eligible students to fill it in as a reflection for students time spent at University.

LV went on to discuss Surrey Decides which is taking place at the time of the meeting, which is the main Student Officer elections period. As the VP Voice chairs the meeting, the candidates for this role have the opportunity to introduce themselves and to explain why they are running for the role.

Waleed introduced himself first, explaining that he holds himself accountable if he is in any position of authority. He wishes to be transparent in the role, and wants to act as a bridge between the university and students. Waleed mentioned that he hopes to support in improving the University's ranking , as this cannot be done without student satisfaction.

Matt Jarvis then introduced his campaign, mentioning that he is a current voice zone committee member. Matt has previously supported past forums, particularly in pushing for 24-hour access to the library, and wishes to use this past experience in the voice zone to expand upon the role further.

Risper Okello then introduced herself, commenting that she would like to strengthen what already works. She would like to amplify the 'you said, we did' strategy, with a focus on closing the feedback loop. Alongside this, she looks to focus on the University's current priorities and if they are in tandem with the students needs. She feels that representation of minority groups should feel visible, accessible and powerful.

Matt Chappell introduced himself, and that his aim is to bring a real vision to the voice zone. His campaign involves bridging the gap between the students, University executives and the Students' Union. He intends to improve communication campaigns all around so students have an understanding of work being done. He would like to see the Voice Forum and Union Forum to be in-person events, and host a mid-year review of work in the voice zone.

Blaise was the final candidate to introduce himself, and explained his background from working within communities in coaching, through which he feels he has an ability to reach people on an individual level. He would like to get a better understanding of the different student perspectives, bridging the gap between policy and student perspectives. He understands that the University has a diverse student population, all of whom need representing in different ways.

LV thanked candidates for their introductions and reminded everyone that there are other VP Voice candidates who are unable to attend, but will appear on the ballot when voting opens.

The meeting then moved to the first theme of the forum on Assessment and Feedback.

Q1. Students have shared that academic staff will benefit from additional training to ensure that assessment criteria takes students disabilities and neurodiversity into account. One example raised is neurodiverse students being on eye-contact during presentations. Will the university be introducing more training to staff on the importance of inclusive assessment criteria?

ER commented that she agrees that training staff on this topic is really important, and feel that all student-facing staff, not just academic staff should have a good awareness around the challenges that students may face. She notes that a training package is already offered to staff, which is an online module that all staff have access to. Bespoke training sessions are also given to Personal Tutors, raising awareness on topics such as autism and ADHD. She notes that this training is currently not mandatory and feels there needs to be a balance between offering training and making it mandatory. As much as staff already have a fair number of modules to be completing, she feels that this one in particular needs to be pushed out further. ER goes on to mention the Code of practice for Inclusive Education, which sets out types of assessments. Alternative assessments are offered across some schools under reasonable adjustments; however, she feels more can be done to look into this.

AB followed up on the importance of this code of practice in supporting diverse groups of learners. She comments that the university wants to ensure that all teaching and assessment is inclusive, so that it is not a stand-alone idea. She notes that more is needed to be done on this.

Q2. In light of the increasing availability of generative AI tools, many Universities are considering how to develop assessments which maintain academic integrity. Considering the value of online assessments, how will the University diversify assessments at Surrey, to avoid a return on over-reliance on in-person exams, which can be complicated and expensive?

AB explained that the University's new AI framework will be implemented in September 2026 that addresses AI's opportunities, limitations, challenges and ethical uses. The University wishes to ensure fair and equitable access to AI through MyAI Surrey, which students have received email confirmation regarding. The AI Notification framework will also be launched in September 2026, designed to help students critically engage with AI. AB added that the University are not planning a blanket-ban on any AI tools or a return to in-person exams. There will instead be a focus on 'process assessment', where students have to demonstrate the critical steps leading to an output.

Q3. This year, several of our Course-Rep Wins have been submitted after resolving issues with late or poor-quality assessment feedback. Considering feedback has been a long-standing area for improvement in the NSS, is a new approach needed to provide continued full satisfaction with feedback?

AB commented that this has been a major focus for the university this year, with points such as the timings of when feedback is received and the clarity of assessment briefs being worked through. AB is keen to hear examples of good and bad practice on this from students.

ER added that there have been ongoing conversations between the University and course reps on exam feedback and assessments, alongside the timetabling and turnaround of feedback. ER does however feel that feedback is provided within a module, however it is not necessarily seen as feedback, and believed that the University could better communicate all of these opportunities for feedback.

LV then moved on to sharing some questions which had been submitted by attendees of the meeting

Q1. Do you think it would be possible to increase the size of clocks in exam halls and make them digital so that students can keep to exam timings?

AB was unaware that having a non-digital clock might be less preferred. ER added this does vary between the sizes of the room in which the exams are taking place in, and that this is an issue which can be sorted fairly easily and quickly.

Q2. Why are there not lab tours and practical sessions for PG/T Civil and Environmental Engineering?

BN explained that practical sessions are in fact provided as part of these courses, however, is unsure about the lab-tours section of the question. BN is happy to reach out to the student who asked this question to gain some further context.

Q3. What kind of student consultation was done before launching MySurrey AI?

LV commented that the SU was consulted. AB added that this new initiative is a starting point, with students gaining access to 1 LLM. She explained how it was key when developing it that any information within this would not be sent outside of the Surrey environment, and that equitability was also taken into account.

Q4. How is the university planning to educate students on the consequences of using Generative AI?

AB outlined that the main reason for bringing in the framework is due to it being a major technological development and that it is key to address this in terms of students' education, as students are going to need to be AI literate once they graduate. BN added, from a sustainability perspective, that this will be part of any scoping for Net Zero targets. There is a pure-click model imbedded, meaning there will be data on the usage in comparison to the costs which go into it. The costs are currently being kept relatively cheap due to the number of students using it.

Q5. How is it going to work for creative and performance-based courses, especially considering some creative organisations and associations have been publicly opposed to generative AI?

AB highlighted the different strands to AI, and there can be different uses for software between subjects, so emphasised the importance of AI being used in a discipline-specific way.

Q6. There are multiple credible reports that AI Chatbots can be detrimental for mental health. How is Surrey going to safeguard students, given that the same AI is now being given to students to be used as part of the framework?

ER highlighted that she does worry generally about the impact technology has on mental health and that there needs to be an awareness of this amongst students. She feels that it is up to students to decide how they will use the technology given but emphasised that the university continues to support students however best when it comes to these decisions.

Q7. Students have mentioned that there continues to be issues with the attendance app. What are the University's plans to support students with these issues to get them resolved?

ER quoted some recent data which suggests that the attendance app is working for 90% of students, although some issues continue to be highlighted by students. ER recommends that students check that the correct settings are switched on for the app to work, and that if issues persist, these are

reported to IT. Looking at the long-term, ER discussed that alternative ways of checking-in are being explored to get around the issues.

LV Then introduced a short break and reminded students to complete the NSS.

The meeting then continued into the second theme of having an Inclusive Campus, with questions relating to both students and staff on accessibility across campus. LV reminded students that the Q+A function.

Q1. During Black History Month, students raised concerns about a lack of staff diversity at Surrey. Does the University have plans to improve diversity among the pool of both visiting and permanent staff to match the student community?

AB noted that the University fully recognises the importance of representation, and that overall, data shows a consistent year-on-year improvement of diversity amongst staff and leadership profiles. She highlights that there are various schemes in place to improve this even further, such as targeted recruitment initiatives, for example, Surrey Black Scholars. AB fully recognises that more needs to be done around this to improve diversity even further.

BN added that further training is being implemented, which emphasises the need for staff to travel with unconscious bias, and that if staff can understand their biases, then they can hopefully be making more informed and imbedded decisions, meaning that there is no disadvantage to any underrepresented groups.

Q2. The International Students Network has shared some feedback that it can be un-clear what support is available to them, including visas and employability support. Does the university have any plans for a centralised, targeted approach to support international students?

ER began by emphasising that The Hive is the best place for students to go in terms of any support which is needed, and that there is an International Student Advice Team which can provide information on visas or other specific issues they may have. ER understands that there is an increasing diversity in the countries which international students are arriving from, and that a task and finish group has been commissioned to iron out any gaps in support which International Students receive. ER also encourages any and all students to reach out to the Employability team if they have any queries surrounding this, and recent data suggests that 75% of the appointments offered do of to International Students.

AB added that the more diverse learns are, the more accountability the University should be taking in ensuring that all practices are as inclusive as possible. ER also added that there are programmes in place where international students can join Surrey for 1 year of study, then be supported through 1 year in the industry within FEPS.

Q3. Disabled students continue to share frustration in sudden changes to campus accessibility and a lack of communication on fixes for on-going issues. What is the University doing to resolve long-standing issues and improve communication and transparency around campus accessibility?

ER is aware that this is an issue which comes up fairly regularly particularly with having an aging campus, for example, lifts go out of action, and students sometimes need to go far out of their way just to be able to get to lectures. ER highlighted that delays in resolving issues have not gone unnoticed and that she will be following up with the estates team and the comms team to ensure students are aware of any disruptions, and where to find key information on this.

LV then moved back to raising questions proposed by the audience on this topic.

Q1. Can the University make more connections and partnerships with employers for Masters' Students regarding placements or grad-job opportunities?

ER commented that the University is building more courses with the employability year in and are also looking to diversity the types of courses which these opportunities are available for. The employability team are launching a batch of short-term, 4-week long placement opportunities across the summer, and that the University is working hard to constantly build employability skills for students. AB emphasises this by highlighting that this is the principle of what Surrey does as a university. BN added that he feels the University could do a better job in collating a list of/ database of companies which have previously interacted with Surrey.

Q2. Given the environmental impact of ChatGPT, has inclusion and use of AI pushed-back on the University's sustainability goals?

BN commented that the University plans to be Net Zero in its Scope 1 and 2 Emissions by 2030, meaning that direct energy used will be sources from Net Zero supply. The University is planning to build a large solar farm of Blackwell Farm, however notes that there have been some issues surrounding planning permission. He hopes that the farm should be in-place in the near future, given that the University has already sourced a partner to aid with this project. He adds that at its peak, the farm will generate 50% of the energy needed to power Stag Hill campus. He states that issues surrounding ChatGPT usage fall under the in-direct usage, which he understands that the University does need to get on-top of, under Scope 3. He is keen to engage students further on this discussion, in order to keep the University to a very high standard regarding this.

Q3. Why are classrooms not fixed for each batch/cohort? It would be really useful to know about empty rooms so that students can use them.

ER commented that cohorts are not given the same classrooms for sessions due to the number of students and the size of the campus. She stated that the university is trialling a block-timetabling model across 2-3 days to further support commuting students. She further discussed the room booking system which is in place for students to be able to book-out spare rooms on campus.

Q4. It would be good to have a team to raise or escalate grievances that Circuit Laundry has been unable to resolve. Is this possible?

LV added that from a Students' Union perspective, the VP Community meets with the company fairly regularly and recommended for students to reach out to her if students have any further concerns.

ER was unsure of the team within the University which Circuit Laundry falls under, however, she will find out the answer to this and communicate with LV for this information to be passed to students.

Q5. Is the University planning on expanding its network of partner Universities for study exchange to allow a wider range of students from different countries to come to Surrey, and at the same time, being able to send more students to partner Universities?

AB stated that if there are particular suggestions for partner Universities or countries which they would be interested in for them to reach out to AB's team, and that they are always on the lookout for new partners and sign new agreements on average once per month.

BN added that there are some new exciting opportunities in the works for campuses abroad, which many are not available for current students, however, will offer pathways for transnational educational opportunities.

Q6. The bridge between the Station and the University has been closed for a very long time and is causing many issues. Could there be an easier route to get from the station to the University as this has prevents some students from attending lectures.

ER noted that the University itself did not get much notice ahead of this closure at the end of the Semester 1 Exam Period. ER was unsure of how much longer it would be closed for and that communications between the company involved and the University has not been great. She commented that if you put this route through google maps, the route suggested, behind the back of the cathedral, is not very accessible, and suggested an alternative route for students to follow from behind the back of the station. ER is committing to asking the company for an update as to when the bridge will be re-opened.

LV added that she believes that the bridge has be re-opened on the day of this Forum.

LV then brought the forum to a close and thanked both students and staff for their contributions, and reminded students of upcoming events and opportunities linked to Surrey Decides.