

# Surrey Students' Union Priorities 2023-24

This document outlines the priorities of Surrey Students' Union, providing a strategic foundation for the goals and priorities for this academic year that will be reviewed at each University Students' Union Committee (USUC) meeting. This document embodies our collective determination to enhance the student experience to foster a dynamic and inclusive culture.

To ensure a thorough and representative approach, the priorities listed here have been established through student feedback and student representation from all backgrounds and academic levels. It is a testament to our dedication to enhancing the quality of education, amplifying student voices, and championing diversity and inclusivity.

## Cost of Living

### 1. Cost of Living Working Group

a. The cost-of-living crisis continues and it's important that our strong focus on this area remains. Survey data shows that for 76% of students, the cost-of-living crisis has impacted their wellbeing, and it is crucial that students can continue to enjoy their experience at Surrey without having to sacrifice important aspects of their student life. We want to work in partnership with the University to **prioritise affordability on campus for groceries, food and entertainments**, something many students called for during our 22-23 Speak Week. We will be **re-instating our Cost of Living Working Group** and using this to discuss the issue widely with University colleagues, creating real change for students.

### 2. Postgraduate Researchers

a. We want to specifically **highlight the unique needs of our Postgraduate Research student community** by continuing to **liaise with our PG Society regarding the impact of Cost of Living challenges on our PGR members**, who occupy both a student and staff role in their University careers. We want the affordability of student life whilst pursuing a research degree to not create barriers to attracting diverse, exceptional talent to Surrey.

### 3. Hardship Fund Access

a. Through our Cost of Living focus, we want to **ensure that all students have access to hardship funding**, by working closely with the Student Experience team on the communication of the scheme to students, fund access requirements, and the application process.

#### 4. Access to accommodation

a. It is crucial to the student experience that the University can provide reasonably priced quality accommodation to enable students to live affordably on campus. **We want to see the University commit to the consistent provision of accommodation bands A and B on campus.** In light of recent issues regarding the oversubscription of student accommodation, and the growing national pressures in the private rental sector, the University's infrastructure planning processes must be proactively managed to guarantee our accommodation provision is fit for the future so students do not face unnecessary financial barriers at the outset of their student journey.

## Engagement and Participation

#### 1. Student Spaces

a. We know that our members are looking for a social life at Surrey that they will always remember, and the opportunity to meet new people in a safe and affordable environment. Currently, only 61% of students agree that the Union provides social spaces that meet students' needs. **Our main venue, Rubix, and our wider Union building, require investment** to equip us to provide the experience that students expect, with the Union at the center of students' social lives. Our current projects in the EFCS capital planning process would provide much needed improvements to the Union building, so **we believe these requests should receive strong support from the University's Executive Board.**

#### 2. Accessibility

a. To promote student engagement and participation, it's crucial that our physical spaces are accessible to all. The current Union building requires several accessibility updates, and this is an ongoing issue for the wider campus. On behalf of our members, it is unacceptable to have measures in place to support disabled students which are not well-maintained or promptly fixed. **We want to see an improved level of accountability to secure a future where all students are able to actively participate in university life and safely navigate campus at all times.** We know, through our Pulse survey data, that students with a disability report far lower overall life satisfaction, and lower satisfaction with their Union and our impact on their wellbeing, and this makes it clear that we need to prioritise these improvements.

b. We want to work in partnership with the University to **introduce a sensory room on Stag Hill and Manor Park.** By implementing sensory rooms on our campus, we can take a significant step toward ensuring that neurodiverse students have the support they need to succeed in their educational journey. Accessibility was also a recurring theme in the feedback gathered from students during our 22-23 Speak Week. This initiative aligns with our shared values of diversity, equity, and

inclusion, and it sends a clear message that we are committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment for all students.

### 3. Improved Partnership Communication

a. The Union's election turnout continues to be a challenge and this year we want our partnership activity to tackle this directly, as we feel this is an important measure of the Union's engagement with its members, and of student investment in their university community. We are keen to work more closely with the University's communications team to get the message to students who may not traditionally vote. We have identified, through the NSS, that students from GSA, Politics and Engineering Departments are less engaged with the Union and this is something we will be seeking to remedy this year, requiring **active partnership communication in these areas and across the University community from both professional services and our academic community at Surrey.**

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

### 1. Celebrating Diversity

a. The Union wants to continue to work with the University to identify a place to **celebrate Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic alumni who have had a significant impact on the student experience**, alongside ongoing work to recognise University staff. We also want to see a renewed commitment from the University to ensuring that the staff who deliver education and student support at Surrey are representative of the wealth of diversity amongst our student population.

### 2. Sports Participation

a. 34% of students who answered our Being Well, Doing Well survey said that they had cut back on activities that they enjoy for financial reasons. We will work with Surrey Sports Park through our Team Surrey partnership to identify a **specific fund for students who may experience financial barriers to sports participation** due to their socio-economic backgrounds. This activity fund will ensure that all students can benefit from physical activity while at University, and that the Union and University do not discourage student sporting talent due to a lack of funds to participate in more costly sporting activities. We also want to work with the University to **provide a strong incentive to Clubs and Societies to promote inclusivity** and to reduce barriers to participation on the basis of protected characteristics.

# Education

## 1. Assessment and Feedback

a. Despite significant progress in student satisfaction with the academic experience at Surrey, Assessment and Feedback remains the area which falls behind. The Union's representative structures have an increasingly important part to play in the University's continued work in this area. We want to work with the University to **establish more robust standards and principles particularly for feedback on assessed work**, learning from sector best practice and from our well-established Course Representative scheme to ensure that assessment and feedback is fair, timely, and actively develops our students as learners.

## 2. Academic Quality and Standards

a. We want to increase our shared focus on the awarding rate gap between students from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds and their white counterparts. We have also seen from the NSS that satisfaction across all measures is consistently lower for non-White students, with the exception of organisation and management, student voice, and the Students' Union. We want to see **specific measures taken to improve satisfaction amongst these student communities**, and we will continue to represent student interests in this area to senior University leaders.

b. The University continues to invest in new schemes and platforms to improve academic quality at Surrey and to provide a seamless student journey. We are supportive of these new projects, such as MySurrey Engagement and MySurrey Voice, but feedback from our students has highlighted inconsistent promotion and utility of these schemes, primarily at ground level in the interactions between students and academic staff. We want to work together to **critically assess the gaps in consistent promotion and communication to guarantee that all students see the benefits of these investments**.

## 3. February Starters

a. We want to recognise the increasing numbers of students who form part of the University's February intake. These students take a different route through the student experience, joining halfway through the traditional academic year, which our research has found can lead to unique challenges in their student journey both socially and academically. Students have reported that they do not feel these courses provide good value for money and want to see improvements to the course structure, the welcome they receive when starting their course, and the wellbeing support and communication they receive, especially over the summer months. We want to partner on these improvements, and **to see the University adapt the delivery of their services and structures to ensure that students starting in February are having a complete student experience**.