

Union Forum

18:00 – 19:30, 28 November, Microsoft Teams

Membership

| Role | Name | Initials |
|-------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Union Chair | Amel Boukabous (Chair) | AB |
| Union President | Jo Yau | JY |
| VP Voice | Kiara Kataike | KK |
| VP Activity | Amy Obi | AO |
| VP Support | Liam White | LW |
| Voice Zone Officers | Chelsea Okyere, Archie Jones, Luana Vasconcelos, Molly Judd, Roshni Bhambra | CO, AJ, LV, MJ, RB |
| Support Zone Officers | Frey Turner, Isobel Adamyk, Namrata Shah, Akeya Herbert, Zoe Powell | FT, IA, NS, AH, ZP |
| Community Zone Officers | Abisola Adeolu, Matt Cockfield-Hall, Michael Yeung, Zac Vigar, Dhan Raj Singh Puri | AA, MC, MY, ZV, DP |
| Activity Zone Officers | Hritika Shah, Shadrach Brando, Sophie Lodge, Joshua Powell, Alexandre Symeonidis-Herzig | HS, SB, SL, JP, ASH |

Apologies For Absence:

Apologies were received from Zoe Powell, Abisola Adeolu, and Zac Vigar

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION AND/OR APPROVAL

Union Priorities | Jo Yau

Priorities For This Academic Year

- These are categorised into four main themes: Cost of Living, Engagement and Participation, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Education.
- Emphasised the importance of addressing the cost of living crisis, mentioning efforts like the Cost of Living Working Group, partnership with the university, and ensuring financial accessibility for students.
- Discussed improving student spaces, enhancing the Student Union building, and working with the university to promote student bodies' key ideas.
- Highlighted initiatives in EDI, including a Wall of Fame to celebrate minority students and alumni, and sports participation efforts to reduce financial barriers.
- Addressed education assessment and feedback, aiming for excellence in academic quality and standards. Stressed the need to support February starters and year-round student engagement.

Voice Zone Updates | Kiara Kataike

Speak Week

- Over 800 individual responses and 1000 pieces of feedback were gathered.
- Increased engagement with students compared to the previous campaign in May.

Student Consultation & By-elections

- Discussed student consultation on the Union's strategy.
- Successfully filled three vacancies in the officer team with a strong turnout.

Collaboration With Stagecoach

- Working on a support network for feedback on Stagecoach services.
- Collaborating with campus services and local council for service improvements.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

- Roshni: Collaborated on International Students Day.
- Luana: Focused on international students' interests and workshop participation.
- Archie: Engaged with local MP candidate on student accommodation and funding.
- Chelsea: Developed connections with placement students, proposing a support network.
- Molly: Attended the FEPS Faculty Education Committee for student representation.

Progress On Union Priorities

- Cost of Living: Addressed student issues in the Student Voice Forum.
- Accessibility: Highlighted student voice on accessibility issues.
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: Conducted monthly student equality network meetings and worked on a black students webpage.
- Education: Presented survey findings to the university and contributed to the AI use guide.

Upcoming Work & Plans

- Preparing insight report for Speak Week
- Planning for the main election in February with a focus on increasing candidate and voter numbers.
- Organising a social for course reps and head reps to acknowledge their hard work.

Activity Zone Updates | Amy Obi

Highlights & Achievements

- Disability Week Support: Supported Team Surrey during Disability Week (from September 30th), providing opportunities for students to try sports catering to disabilities and neurodiversity, with ten different sport categories.
- Regional Bucks SE Meeting: Chaired a segment as the student chair for the Southeast Region, focusing on engaging students not accessing traditional sports or club structures.
- By-election Support: Aided the Voice Zone in the by-election to recruit a new Societies Chair for the Activity Zone, which was successful.
- Female Takeover Event: Over 130 tickets sold for the event on October 28th, with plans to create more regular opportunities for female students.

Challenges & Adjustments

- Noted lower than expected uptake for Give It A Go Week, possibly due to overlapping communication focus on by-elections. Plans to adjust timing for better attendance and impact.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

- Ratification of Societies: Successfully ratified around 15 societies and welcomed a new Societies Chair, Alexander, from the gaming society.
- Team Surrey Chair's Contribution: Josh, the Team Surrey Chair, significantly contributed to the Movember campaign, raising around £12,000, and engaged in club sports standing including a vote on tour company selection.

Progress On Union Priorities

- Cost of Living: Worked to promote the access Fund with Team Surrey, helping students sign up for memberships and facilities with funding support.
- Engagement and Participation: Continued society standings, sports standings, and enabled student voting on tour provider.
- Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion: The female takeover event was a success, and there are plans to repeat it. Disability Week was run with a view to review and improve the campaign next year. Aimed to integrate EDI into club/society committee training and recruitment.
- Education: Focused on initiatives like locker room talk and team Surrey takeovers on AP Plaza to increase student engagement and education about available activities.

Upcoming Work & Plans

- Working with the newly appointed Activities Manager to map out goals and campaigns for post-Christmas break.
- Planning for big events including Varsity, refreshers events, with a focus on February intake and international students.
- Working to secure additional funding for student activities, aligning with the Union's priority on cost of living.

Support Zone Updates | Liam White

Highlights & Achievements

- Housing Crisis Management: Successfully managed the housing crisis at the beginning of the year, implementing support measures in collaboration with other members.
- Free and Accessible Events: Ran events during well-being and wobble week to support students' transition after freshers.
- Period Poverty Project Expansion: Expanded the project to multiple schools on Stag Hill and Manor Park.
- New Consent Course Development: Working on replacing the current course with a better one, rolling out from next year.
- Health Assured Service: Involved in developing a service to provide support when the Centre for Well-being or Nightline is oversubscribed.

Part-Time Officer & Others Highlights

- Acknowledged the contributions of Frey, Isabel, Zoe, and Akeya in various initiatives, including SHAG days, crafternoons, board games, and campaign planning.
- Praised the efforts of Nightline and Welfare Watch in providing support services, especially during the winter term.

Progress On Union Priorities

- Cost of Living: Organised 18 free events to build student communities and present support services. Continued provision of free sexual health resources and free period products.
- Engagement & Participation: Ensured representation on groups like the Disability and Diversity Group and efforts to improve Union and University communications regarding support options.
- Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion: Focused on training wellbeing champions and addressing intersectionality in clubs and societies.
- Education: Involved in various academic committees, focusing on student engagement, experience, and the efficacy of university administration. Addressed issues of hidden course costs and disparities in educational experiences across different departments.

Upcoming Work & Plans

- Running events to build housing communities and addressing housing issues.
- Planning events for the winter period to support students who may be isolated.
- Preparing for an exam support campaign in January to ensure students feel supported during exams.

Community Zone Updates | Jo Yau

Highlights & Achievements

- Community Hub: Celebrated the opening of the new Community Hub, a significant achievement providing students with a low-cost place for necessities and repair services.
- Sustainability Contribution: Emphasised the Hub's role in advancing the sustainability agenda.
- Union Representative Priorities: Worked with the team to develop and present these priorities to various university boards and councils.
- Accommodation Strategy: Focused on affordable and well-located accommodation, a key issue at the start of the academic year.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

- Mel: Praised Mel for increasing her visibility and engagement in various campaigns and the by-election.
- Matt: Highlighted Matt's role in organising a team for University Challenge and his involvement in the Student Garden project.
- Abi: Acknowledged Abi's crucial participation in Black History Month, pumpkin carving workshops, and community zone events.
- Thanraj: Noted Thanraj's success in getting votes for this year's RAG charities.

Progress On Union Priorities

- Cost of Living: Discussed efforts to reduce ticket and drink prices, and hosting low-cost or free events for students.
- Engagement & Participation: Mentioned Steve the Stag's participation in local Christmas festivities and the Christmas switch-on event. Currently planning the refreshers fair and other events like One World Week.
- Equality, Diversity, & Inclusion: Ensured Union staff will receive updated training on EDI issues. Active in the university's Athena Swan steering group, focusing on women's development in higher education.

- Education: Involved in developing the university's education strategy and its focus areas, like the National Student Survey.

Upcoming Work & Plans

- Focused on recruiting a new student trustee and appointing a new member to the Union's communications team.
- Planning upcoming events, including the Christmas events and Surrey Decide.

Other Events & Volunteering Efforts:

- Discussed the success of events in Manor Park, Harry's Preese, and VIP tables.
- Highlighted the progress in the student garden, including beekeeping initiatives and the contribution of volunteers.
- Emphasised the importance of various volunteering opportunities for student welfare and sustainability.

Union Strategy: Student Consultation | Jo Yau

PTO Motivations & Goals:

- Aimed to make committee member roles easier and more rewarding.
- Focused on fostering a sense of community and sustainability.
- Driven by experiences of accessibility challenges, wanted to advocate for improvements and listen to student needs.
- Motivated by accessibility and enabling student voices through voting in Union activities.
- Desired to enhance student enjoyment and inclusion, with a focus on racial inclusivity and feedback on student nightlife.

Biggest Issues For Students at Surrey:

- Highlighted accommodation issues, particularly heating problems and general maintenance on campus.
- Emphasised the cost of living, noting the financial struggles of students, particularly those in final year, and the impact on their academic performance. Also pointed out the isolation and lack of community for third-year students.
- Commented on the financial inaccessibility of university experience leading to disengagement in extracurricular activities. Expressed concern about the impact of this on students' overall university experience.
- Raised the issue of long wait times for university services and lack of communication, impacting students' clarity on coursework, accommodation support, and other essential areas.

Role of the Union in addressing these issues:

- VP Activity
 - Emphasised working to lower financial barriers for students participating in clubs and societies.
 - Discussed efforts to secure extra funding and increase the Activity and Access Fund.
 - Suggested improving the visibility of funding opportunities for students.
- VP Voice
 - Stressed the importance of collecting student feedback to champion change.
 - Aimed to use feedback from events like Speak Week to lobby the university for action on key issues like accommodation and Stagecoach services.

- Advocated for transparency and accountability from the university in addressing student concerns.
- VP Support
 - Highlighted the importance of prioritising critical services in the face of budget cuts.
 - Stressed the role of officers in voicing student needs to the university, particularly regarding essential services that should not be compromised.
 - Emphasised the power of officers in framing student needs to the university administration.
- Team Surrey Chair, Josh
 - Discussed challenges with sports club kit costs and lack of transparency from Team Surrey.
 - Suggested providing clearer information on costs to help students budget effectively.
 - Raised the issue of responsiveness from bursary teams and suggested Union intervention for better communication.

Union Future Priorities:

- Cost of Living and Financial Challenges
 - Advocated for continued focus on the cost of living, exploring ways to increase budgets and understanding its impact on students.
 - Stressed the importance of addressing the financial stresses of students, including lobbying for reduced costs and increased transparency.
 - Proposed financial education for students, emphasising the need for guidance on managing finances, overdrafts, and credit.
- Cultural Events
 - Suggested maintaining and promoting cultural events to foster community and cultural heritage appreciation.
- Accessibility
 - Highlighted the ongoing importance of accessibility on campus and in academic support, urging continued attention to this area.
- Environmental and Ethical Concerns
 - Recommended the Union focus on boycotting the oil, gas, and arms industries on campus to align with environmental and ethical student concerns.
- Increased Funding and Financial Support
 - Discussion on the need for more funding opportunities for students.
 - Suggestion to lobby the university for increased support and financial resources.
 - Emphasis on going beyond current efforts to address prominent financial issues faced by students.
- Cost-Effective Services & Pricing
 - Focus on lobbying for cost-effective options at the university.
 - Concerns about pricing of services like Stagecoach, circuit laundry, and campus shops.
 - Advocacy for transparency in service selection and pricing decisions by the university.
- Paid Opportunities & Placement Concerns
 - Highlighting the need for more paid opportunities and reducing reliance on unpaid placements.
 - Suggestion for the university to create flexible, in-house work opportunities for students.
 - Stress on the importance of considering students' financial stability in university decisions.

- Reducing Club Membership Costs
 - Proposal to explore ways to reduce the cost of club memberships for students.
 - Considering approaches used at other universities for inspiration.
 - Acknowledgment of the positive impact of such measures on student participation in clubs and societies.

Topic of Discussion: Use of Amazon Vouchers | Amel Boukabous

- Background & Concerns
 - Feedback during speak week raised concerns about using Amazon vouchers as incentives.
 - Ethical and business practices of Amazon were questioned.
 - Alternative, more ethical incentives were suggested.
- Union's Current Stance & Policies
 - No agreed policy on Amazon voucher use by the Union.
 - Reference to other students' unions promoting ethical business partnerships.
 - Examples include banning certain businesses or products and opting for alternatives like 'One for All' vouchers.
 - The Union's sustainability policy emphasizes environmental and ethical considerations.
- Officer Views
 - Recognised the challenge in finding providers with aligned ethical values.
 - Pointed out the difficulty in vetting every company for ethical standards.
 - Suggested offering students more choice in voucher selection.
 - Mentioned Amazon's convenience, especially for international students.
 - Agreed on exploring alternatives while considering convenience.
 - Supported continued use of Amazon vouchers but with alternative options.
 - Questioned the necessity of Amazon vouchers.
 - Suggested exploring other vouchers usable at various shops.
 - Emphasised giving students the choice.
- Voting and Conclusion
 - A vote was conducted to decide whether to seek alternatives to Amazon vouchers.
 - Majority voted for supporting the use of alternative vouchers.
 - Amazon vouchers will be used as a last resort.

CLOSING ITEMS

Any Other Business:

N/A