

# Surrey Students' Union Priorities 2024-25

This document outlines the annual 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. In doing so we formalise our joint commitment to improving the student experience by acknowledging, and acting upon, our students' needs.

These priorities are built upon our wealth of student insight, the objectives of our elected student representatives, and are closely aligned with the priorities outlined in our newly launched Students' Union Strategic Plan 24-27.

## Cost of Living

### 1. Affordable belonging events

We will **expand our hosting of free and affordable belonging events**, both during the pilot year of this project and beyond, measuring our success through both overall attendance and engagement of students who have not previously engaged with the Union. We will also **work alongside the University's CSO directorate to ensure the University's event offering is broad and affordable.**

***Rationale:** 198 change suggestions across our 23-24 Speak Week campaigns called for an increase in opportunities to connect with other students, with a particular focus on continuing to increase both affordability and diversity of events on offer at the Union. 45% of students agree the Union has a positive impact on their social life, and 41% agree the Union helps them make the most out of their time as a student.*

### 2. National campaigning for increased student funding

We will work at a national level alongside local Students' Union partners to lobby for the high cost of living in the south-east to be recognised similarly to the cost of living in London through the **expansion of the London weighting scheme**. We hope to **engage our local MP and senior University leadership in our national campaigning efforts** to improve central sources of funding for students and for Higher Education more widely.

***Rationale:** Addressing the increased cost of living was a recurring theme across all topics during Speak Week, with 63 suggestions specifically calling for improvements to student funding, hardship support, and value for money.*

### 3. Strategies to address accommodation shortages

We will **improve the quality of information available to students on the topic of renting privately in the local area**, especially for international students, and address barriers to private renting for certain student groups through **exploring the re-introduction of a University-provided guarantor scheme**. We would like to work with the University on the **development of a long-term housing strategy** to ensure increases in student intake are met with appropriate resourcing of affordable accommodation.

***Rationale:** The priorities for students providing feedback on accommodation during Speak Week was the affordability and the availability of low-cost, good quality on-campus accommodation. Agreement in Pulse that the availability of accommodation in Guildford meets students' needs has steadily declined, falling to 57%. 52% of students are happy with the price they are paying for their University accommodation, and only 37% say the same for private accommodation.*

## Employability

### 4. Increasing paid work opportunities

We will work alongside the University to **increase the employment opportunities for students on campus**, and to **increase the diversity of students undertaking paid work** in the University community, both in regards to demographics and in the level of previous professional experience. We would like to develop a strategic approach to **increasing permanently available opportunities** for students across all central University teams, in addition to one-off opportunities or fixed-term roles.

***Rationale:** Employability continues to be a top priority for our students - 59 change suggestions during Speak Week highlighted that students have a desire for more paid job opportunities on campus and more opportunities to develop their professional skills. 25% of students surveyed in Pulse agree that the Union is making them more employable.*

### 5. Professional Training Year

We want to work with the University to improve the quality and impact of the professional training year offering through **minimising unpaid placements, increasing support provision, and exploring how they can be credit-bearing** for all degree classifications.

***Rationale:** Currently, only 26.1% of Level 5 students are choosing to take a professional training year. In the NSS, positive sentiment towards the statement "How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future" saw a minor decrease from 2023 to 2024, and positivity is lowest amongst POLAR quintiles 1 & 2.*

## Access, Participation, and Student Success

### 6. Sensory room

We aim to build on the work started by last year's officer team on the **creation of a sensory room on campus** to benefit those students who have called for sensory spaces, ensuring that neurodiverse students in particular have the support they need to succeed in their educational journey.

***Rationale:** Disabled and neurodiverse students are between 3 – 14% less likely to feel satisfied with their Students' Union overall, and between 16 – 21% less likely to report high life satisfaction than their non-disabled peers. Disabled students are also consistently less positive about all aspects of their University experience in the NSS.*

### 7. Campus accessibility

We know **our main venue, Rubix, and our wider Union building, remain in critical need of investment** to equip us to provide the rich and diverse social experience that students expect, and to ensure that the **opportunities and events on offer at the Students' Union are physically accessible to all students**. We also aim to formally **establish a Disability and Neurodiversity Equality Network** to facilitate collaboration between students and staff to address inequalities and inaccessibility at Surrey.

***Rationale:** 28% of students surveyed in Pulse agree they would think of going to the Students' Union when meeting friends. Students continuously highlight the inaccessibility of certain areas, facilities, and buildings on campus, with 37 change suggestions specifically highlighting the improvements needed to the Students' Union building.*

### 8. Digital education

We will advocate for the benefits for students of digital assessments, including commuting students and those with caring responsibilities, and aim to collaborate with the University to improve assessment security through **resuming the project to introduce a digital assessments platform**. We also hope to have the opportunity to **review academic integrity outcomes in light of new AI guidance** to ensure that students' success on their course is not impacted by inconsistencies in application of University regulations.

***Rationale:** 55 change suggestions received during Speak Week called for improved inclusive practices at the University, and a further 46 highlighted the need for modernisation and digitisation of assessment and feedback processes. The Assessment and Feedback section of the NSS continues to fall behind all other academic metrics in overall positivity.*

## Financial Resilience

### 9. Student satisfaction monitoring

We will ensure that we work closely with the University to **monitor and address any decreases in student satisfaction** with academic quality, academic and pastoral support, and central student administration and services as a result of the financial resilience programme of cost-saving measures. In line with our Financial Resilience Policy, we call for **increased scrutiny of student satisfaction with the academic experience at Surrey** through MEQ, NSS, and Pulse survey data. Similarly for non-academic services, we call for the **monitoring of campus services satisfaction data available through Pulse, and CSO service metrics**, including response rates, waiting times, and case resolutions.

***Rationale:** Concerns were raised during Speak Week regarding the impact of reduced University staffing on the quality of both academic and personal support on offer to students, especially in departments which have seen greatest changes. 52 changes highlighted the desire for high-quality support from department staff and personal tutors, and increasing staff availability, whilst 120 changes focused on the current provision of academic support, with students calling for improvements to access to course materials, tailored support, and digital innovation.*

## Visibility

### 10. Making a visible national contribution

We will utilise our position as a leading Students' Union to influence at a national level on behalf of students, by **collaborating with the University effectively to respond to national consultations**, and uniting our efforts and expertise to influence local and national decisions which will directly impact our student community.

***Rationale:** Student agreement that the Union represents students on national issues is lower than on University issues, at 39% and 70% respectively. 89 changes fell under the "Student Voice & Advocacy" theme of our Speak Week insight, with students asking for a greater level of visibility of opportunities to provide feedback, and the specific impact of Union officers and staff advocating on students' behalf.*

### 11. Celebrating Union & student success

We wish to **partner with the University to better celebrate student and Students' Union successes** through collaborative communication. By highlighting the value in providing feedback to the Union and in getting involved in student activity, we will showcase the Students' Union as a credible and impactful contributor to Surrey life.

***Rationale:** We saw an increase to engagement in nominations and voting during our main election, Surrey Decides, as a result of improved communications support from the University last year. 112 changes were suggested during Speak Week to improve collaborative Union & University communications with students, 83 of which directly called for greater promotion and visibility of Students' Union successes. 36% of students answered "neither agree nor disagree" to the statement "the Union represents the views of students effectively", and knowledge of Sabbatical Officer successes remains lower than other awareness metrics.*