Speak Week Insight Report

November 2024

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Introduction – Luana Vasconcelos, Vice-President Voice

Speak Week is an essential campaign in the Voice Zone and wider Union calendar. It provides a valuable opportunity for students to have their say on the most important matters to them, and to see how seriously their feedback is taken by the Union and University. It has been a hugely rewarding experience to lead the campaign this year and to meet students and showcase their student voices. The data in this Report will help Officers and staff better understand student priorities, helping to create change powered by student feedback.

Speak Week Summary

Speak Week is the flagship campaign for the Voice Zone. Speak Week ran from 18 – 22 November. The purpose of Speak Week was to gather student feedback to provide Union officers with insight into the current concerns, and priorities for students. This report details feedback from the **723 change suggestions** made in response to our core questions.

The key priorities for students relating to University provisions remain the **affordability and accessibility of campus facilities**, and improvements to the **academic experience** at Surrey. Priorities for changes to Union provision include **nightlife, events, and venues**, and **support for clubs and societies**. Suggested changes to areas of shared interest include **wellbeing and inclusivity,** and **employability support.**

The insight gathered during Speak Week emerged from our primary research activity – gathering a broad range of feedback via our **core questions.** During the campaign, physical ballot boxes were placed around campus and an identical online ballot was promoted on social media to gather suggestions for change.

The core questions were:

1. **What would you do if you were in charge of the University for a day?**
2. **What would you do if you were in charge of the Students' Union for a day?**

We received 723 change suggestions in answer to these questions. This marked an increase of 182 suggestions from our May 2024 Speak Week campaign.

Responses were gathered anonymously. Both questions were optional to answer. Responses to these questions highlighted that some students may not be fully aware of the distinctions between the University and Students' Union, particularly in relation to oversight of activities and initiatives. Our gathered responses, therefore, have been grouped and analysed according to broad themes, regardless of which question the student had answered.

University Interests

Theme 1: Campus Life

170 suggestions were received which related to campus life. The primary recurring themes across this set of responses were **catering, campus facilities, accommodation,** and **transport.**

Catering

49 responses directly referenced catering and food shopping on campus. The majority of these responses were relating to the affordability of food and drink sold in catering outlets on campus. Whilst there were far fewer responses received relating to the cost of items sold in the on-campus shop, following the replacement of Simply Fresh, there continued to be suggestions for more meal deals across other catering outlets. The variety of food on offer recurred across this theme again, primarily focused on adding more cultural food options including halal food options, and a broader range of spices and produce on offer at Co-Op. Finally, a number of change suggestions highlighted the lack of available food options in the evening, and suggested later opening hours for hot food, and more microwaves and vending machines across campus.

Campus Facilities

27 suggestions centred on non-catering campus facilities. Accessibility of campus venues and buildings continued to recur across the feedback submitted this year, as well as other general changes and improvements to the quality of campus buildings through refurbishments and modernisation. Students reported concerns about the length of time taken to repair accessibility issues. Students also called for more social seating areas, and more bookable study spaces. Study spaces in general were a recurring feature of feedback submitted on this theme.

Accommodation

31 responses called for changes to University accommodation. As in previous Speak Week campaigns, the primary feedback was that the affordability of University accommodation and the levels of available budget accommodation on campus could both see improvements. A smaller number of responses focused on making accommodation feel more modern and clean, through more regular maintenance and refurbishments.

Transport

17 responses related directly to transport provision. As in previous Speak Week campaigns, the primary change suggestions focused on bus services, highlighting the reliability and regularity of the bus service. The other notable set of change suggestions focused on parking on campus, focused on the availability of parking on both Stag Hill and Manor Park, and the price of parking.

Theme 2: Academic Experience

129 suggestions were received which related to the academic experience at Surrey. The primary sub-themes included **academic resources, timetabling, assessment & feedback,** and **University staffing.**

Academic Resources & Support

29 suggestions focused on academic resources and support. Recorded lectures and available academic resources such as past papers and captions on lecture recordings featured across a number of change suggestions. Students also called for more interactive lectures and seminars, wanting to make the most of the opportunity to connect with their learning materials, and with academic staff and peers. Some students suggested changes to Library provision, including enforcement of silent study, and availability of textbooks.

Timetabling

26 responses referred to timetabling. It remains clear from responses on this theme that students' preferences for scheduling continue to vary depending on personal schedules, preferences, and living situations. Common themes, however, across responses, were the repeated desire for timetabling information to be released earlier. Another set of change suggestions focused on the improved use of the timetable to include non-academic features, such as events, reminders, or optional academic sessions.

Assessment & Feedback

20 responses related to assessment and feedback. As highlighted in the previous section, the prevailing request is for exam timetables to be released earlier, and broader spacing of assessments during the exam period. There were also change suggestions calling for a greater understanding of assessment briefs and marking criteria, with a small number of students commenting on the perceived "fairness" of marking. Finally, students also called for greater access to past or mock papers to improve understanding and confidence ahead of assessments.

University Staffing

11 responses highlighted continued concerns around the level of access to academic support from staff. The majority of comments around staffing, however, were non-academic and have therefore been categorised in the Wellbeing Support & Inclusivity theme – a shared interest for both the University and Students' Union.

Union Interests

Theme 1: Events & Union Venues

100 responses related to the social experience within the Union – primarily focused on **events** and **venues.**

Events

86 responses included suggested changes to the provision of Union-run events. The greatest number of responses on this sub-theme focused on the variety and quantity of events on offer at the Union. Students suggested a vast number of ideas for events, including more free, day-time, and events taking place across both Stag Hill and Manor Park. Certain student groups were also mentioned as potential audiences for a greater variety of events, such as cultural events, non-drinking events, and alternative music provision at Rubix. A number of change suggestions also highlighted that, whilst the Union offered a great deal of events for students, the awareness of events amongst students varied which may impact attendee numbers.

Union Venues

14 responses related to Union venues more generally. The majority included comments on Rubix prices, but a number called for refurbishments to Rubix, a recurring theme in previous Speak Week campaigns. Students shared that their ability to engage with Union events was impacted by the accessibility of Union venues.

Theme 2: Clubs & Societies

82 responses directly related to **clubs & societies.**

Clubs & Societies

Responses in this theme focused on support for committees and improving the quality of the experience engaging with student groups for current and prospective members. Students highlighted a desire for increased funding and improved clarity around funding processes and budgets for current committee members. A number of suggestions also drew attention to the desire for more visibility and awareness of opportunities to join groups throughout the year, and more showcase events and campaigns to highlight different groups. Finally, students suggested quality measures to reduce inactive groups, and to introduce feedback sessions for members to share their views on the experience of being involved with clubs and societies.

Theme 3: Student Voice

57 suggestions were received which related to the Union's role in **student voice.**

Student Voice

Suggestions for change in relation to the Union's role in providing student voice opportunities on behalf of students were varied. A small number called for more opportunities for feedback, whilst others suggested the available opportunities were sufficient, but rather wanted to see improved communication of Union action and achievements as a result of student feedback. Similarly, some suggestions highlighted a desire for greater engagement with and promotion of Course Representatives, and a small number of suggestions called for better incentives to take on representative positions, especially those that are voluntary.

Theme 4: Support & Advice

41 suggestions were received which related to the **support & advice** on offer at the Students' Union.

Support & Advice

Suggestions for change on this theme focused on increasing visibility and awareness of Union-run advice and support services, including academic advice and peer-support services such as Nightline. Students spoke positively of these services and Union wellbeing campaigns, however they suggested that greater awareness would help students know that the Union can provide support when they encounter issues at Surrey.

Shared Interests

This section summarises change suggestions relating to areas of shared University and Students' Union interest.

Theme 1: Support & Inclusivity

36 responses were received on this theme, with **wellbeing support** and **inclusivity** emerging as sub-themes.

Wellbeing Support

24 responses related primarily to the provision of mental health and wellbeing support. More so than in previous Speak Weeks, students highlighted concerns around support staffing levels, identifying as examples the level of resource in the Disability and Neuroinclusion and MySurrey Hive teams. Students also commented on the closure of Academic Hives, and called for greater clarity in where to go with academic administration concerns. Change suggestions called for the re-introduction of support team emails, or the ability to contact an individual team with an issue, mainly highlighting long wait times as an area of improvement. As with previous Speak Week campaigns, a number of other responses called for more wellbeing initiatives, including events, workshops, resources, and mindfulness education. Finally, students also suggested greater mental health support, including more self-help resources, and opportunities to connect with others to combat isolation and loneliness.

12 suggestions highlighted the need for improved inclusivity in areas of University life. The primary suggestion on this sub-theme related to disability and accessibility support, including improving the speed and quality of the experience of students seeking support and reasonable adjustments. Students also continue to call for greater EDI awareness delivered through training for students and staff. Other groups that were mentioned multiple times were postgraduates, mature students, and international students, who called for improvements to their sense of community and inclusion to the wider student body.

Theme 2: Employability

38 responses were received which directly related to **employability.**

Employability

The majority of responses relating to employability called for more job opportunities on campus, highlighting the desire from students to live and work in close proximity. Students also focused on career support, suggesting more employability workshops, and opportunities for networking and professional development. Finally, students also specifically called for more tailored and personalised careers guidance, directed towards specific departments, disciplines, and career paths.

Theme 3: Cost of Living Support

6 number of responses were received which directly related only to **cost of living support.**

Cost of Living Support

Concerns around the cost of services, events, and student life was a recurring theme across all other areas of gathered insight, however cost of living responses relating to specific areas of student life have been categorised under those themes. This sub-theme in particular includes only the responses calling for greater access to bursaries, scholarships, and hardship support.

Conclusion

Across the insight gathered during Speak Week November 2024, it is clear that the key priorities for students are value for money, a vibrant and inclusive social experience, high-quality academic and professional development, and accessible, compassionate wellbeing support.

The primary areas of the Surrey student experience where students would like to see change occur are:

- Improved accessibility and quality of campus spaces and facilities
- Affordability and quality of student accommodation
- Improved academic resources and facilities on campus
- Clarity and understanding around assessment and feedback practices
- A wider and more inclusive array of Union events
- Improved mental health support and shorter wait times for advice and support
- Greater provision of tailored career support

We suggest that the areas of priority identified by students during Speak Week is used by the incoming Officer team to inform and set the Union's priorities for student representation in the coming academic year.

For more information about Speak Week, visit surreyunion.org/voice/speak-week