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Union Forum

18:00 – 20:00, 17 October, Microsoft Teams

# Membership

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Role** | **Name** | **Initials** |
| Union Chair | Tara Notash (Chair) | TN |
| Union President | Liam White | LM |
| VP Voice | Luana Vasconcelos | LV |
| VP Activity | Ravi Kant | RK |
| VP Support | Sam Buss | SB |
| VP Community | Matt Aikin | MA |
| Voice Zone Officers (PTOs) | Archie Jones, Christian Bergvoll, Jenny Jackson, James Mitchell, Deeya Varsani | AJ, CB, JJ, JM, DV |
| Support Zone Officers (PTOs) | Natalie Savva, Leoni Williams, Christina Joseph Kamble, Ben Matthews, Rebekah Owolabi | NS, LW, CJK, BM, R Owolabi |
| Community Zone Officers (PTOs) | Feyi Salami, Risper Okello, Nehal Boobna, Jaden Ogunlade | FS, R Okello, NB, JO |
| Activity Zone Officers (PTOs) | Hannan Ahmad, Shubham Choudhary, Sharon Chandrashekar, Usha Sree Sunkari, Amelie Gilford | HA, S Choudhary, S Chandrashekar, US, AG |

**Apologies For Absence:**

No apologies were received.

**ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION AND/OR APPROVAL**

**Presentation of the 23-24 Annual Report | Liam White**

Key Achievements

* Voice Zone:
  + Conducted successful Speak Week campaigns, collecting over 2,000 student feedback points.
  + Significant improvements were made to the Course Rep scheme, including social and head rep meetings, culminating in May Rep awards.
* Activity Zone:
  + Facilitated increased student involvement in sports and activities, with the “Give It a Go” week encouraging wider participation.
  + Team Surrey achieved notable improvements, advancing in the BUCS league to 31st place
* Support Zone:
  + Emphasised on student mental health and well-being through two well-being weeks and introduced additional peer support schemes.
  + Noteworthy support was also provided for Nightline, enhancing student access to after-hours mental health services.
* Community Zone:
  + Organised cultural events during One World Week.
  + Successfully ran welcome events.
  + Established the student garden, furthering sustainability efforts across campus.
* Union Representation Efforts:
  + Took active roles in advocating for student concerns around the financial resilience plan, academic assessment, accessibility and the renters’ rights bill with local MP involvement.

**Union Priorities | Liam White**

Priorities For This Academic Year

* These are categorised into five main themes: Cost of Living, Employability, Accessibility, Financial Resilience and Visibility.
* Initiatives for expanding affordable events, collaborating with the university to keep events costs low and lobbying for student funding increases were discussed.
* Includes stronger campaigns around renters’ rights, especially in response to potential housing shortages affecting student access to affordable living arrangements.
* Aims to improve employability opportunities on campus and to create more paid internships and flexible work options within academic departments. This aims to make the PTY experience accessible and credit-bearing for students.
* Initiatives such as establishing sensory spaces, launching a formal disability and neurodiversity network and advocating for sustained digital assessment options are ongoing priorities.
* Monitor impacts on student experiences, advocate for reduced wait times at student support centres and address systemic issues affecting the student experience.
* More focus on increasing the Union’s visibility and communicating ongoing Union and university achievements which will help bridge students with institutional efforts on their behalf.

**Voice Zone Updates | Luana Vasconcelos**

Speak Week (Nov 18-24)

* Planning a series of events, including ‘Feedback cafés” and “Rep Social” to collect student input on campus improvements
* Aims to capture feedback on both Union and University operations

Bye-Elections:

* Scheduled for late October to fill two PTO positions within the Voice and Community Zones. Officers encouraged PTOs to promote the election within their networks.

EDI Efforts:

* Launch of the monthly International Working Group, providing a platform for international students to share feedback on their experiences with university and Union staff.
* Expected to enhance support for international student-specific concerns.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

* Archie: Focused on boosting Union visibility through campus forms and interactive activities. Plans to expand outreach by attending society meetings.
* Christian: Initiated informal meetups within the School of Hospitality and Tourism to foster greater peer engagement and ease course representation.
* Jenny: Worked with societies to establish academic study groups. Signed up for Speak Week and Bye-Election outreach.
* James: Efforts toward making course rep roles more visible and impactful. Highlighted interest in advancing student-led Union feedback systems.

Progress On Union Priorities

* Cost of Living: Addressed student issues in the Student Voice Forum.
* Accessibility: Highlighted student voice on accessibility issues.
* Visibility: The ‘International Working Group’ has been launched through which there will be a monthly meeting where international students have the opportunity to speak to relevant university staff and VP Voice about their experiences and any issues.
* Employability: Work with personal tutors to enhance student support experiences and successes.

Upcoming Work & Plans

* Preparing for Speak Week.
* ‘Feedback Cafes” and “Rep Socials” events for informal feedback.
* Continue working with the Student Equality Network to ensure that students have an opportunity to influence the university’s decisions.
* Organising a social for course reps and head reps to acknowledge their hard work.

**Activity Zone Updates | Ravi Kant**

Highlights & Achievements

* Give It a Go Week: 300+ students participated in sports and society events. Surveys conducted post-event showed a 90% satisfaction rate, with students highlighting the positive impact on their mental well-being and opportunities to meet new people
* Worked with Team Surrey: To promote sports accessibility, especially for students with disabilities, in terms of initiating tailored sports programmes such as wheelchair basketball and sensory-friendly fitness sessions. Efforts were made to train volunteer staff on disability awareness.
* Introduction of Subsidised Activity Passes: Students from low-income backgrounds or those receiving financial support from the university were eligible for these passes. Approximately 120 students benefited from this initiative.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

* Hannan: Introduced weekly recreational sessions in non-traditional sports, drawing participation from international students.
* Sharon: Led initiatives to make sports events accessible to a wider range of students by introducing subsidised passes.

Progress On Union Priorities

* Cost of Living: Aim to help students afford activities, with subsidised passes for low-income students.
* Accessibility: Established accessible sports sessions to ensure all students, regardless of physical ability, could participate.
* Visibility: Promoted ‘Give It a Go’ week extensively and collaborated with societies to help draw attention to activity-led mental health support programs
* Employability: Continued building workshops such as team leadership, event organisation and volunteer training.

Upcoming Work & Plans

* Collaborating with societies to host inter-society sports tournaments
* Increasing activity-related mental health support through partnerships with on-campus fitness resources
* Working to secure additional funding for student activities, aligning with the Union's priority on cost of living.

**Support Zone Updates | Sam Buss**

Highlights & Achievements

* Two Wellbeing Weeks: Included workshops on stress management, relaxation and mental health awareness.
* Housing Awareness Week: Helped students understand their rights as renters and how to look for housing in the midst of a difficult accommodation crisis.
* Nightline: Offered advice to over 3,000 students and supported them through a range of difficult situations.

Part-Time Officer & Others Highlights

* Natalie: Implemented housing workshops to support students facing rental issues, focusing on tenant rights and affordable housing options
* Leoni: Launched ‘Mindful Mondays’ which is a weekly mindfulness practice session to support student well-being
* Praised the efforts of Nightline and Welfare Watch in providing support services

Progress On Union Priorities

* Cost of Living: Organised workshops on budgeting, housing rights and affordable food options. Collaborated with the Community Zone to expand the Community Hub’s low-cost essentials.
* Accessibility: Expanded mental health and well-being resources, established mental health drop-in sessions
* Visibility: Enhanced promotion of well-being initiatives throughout social media, highlighting available resources such as Mindful Mondays and Nightline to ensure students are aware of support services.
* Employability: Offered resilience and stress-management workshops tailored to improve students’ readiness for the workforce.

Upcoming Work & Plans

* Running events to build housing communities and addressing housing issues.
* Increasing Nightline’s visibility on campus with promotional campaigns and training additional volunteers
* Launching a new peer support initiative – “Student to Student” – offering mental health support led by trained student volunteers

**Community Zone Updates | Matt Aikin**

Highlights & Achievements

* Despite not having a Vice President of the Community Zone for majority of the year, the Zone was able to run a huge number of successful events such as: Colours Ball, Showcases at the Union, Freshers Week, Re-Freshers Week and One World Week’s cultural events.
* Staff and Student Garden: Through this initiative, the zone was able to reinforce the community spirit at the university and continue to increase volunteering opportunities.
* Expanded Community Hub: Offered essentials to students in need and launched new upcycling workshops to promote sustainability.
* Hosted a Voter Registration Drive in collaboration with local government to encourage civic engagement.

Part-Time Officer Highlights

* Feyi: Organised a series of low-cost cultural events during One World Week to foster inclusivity
* Jaden: Initiated “Green Guildford”, a community project focusing on sustainability education and waste reduction

Progress On Union Priorities

* Cost of Living: Expanded the Community Hub’s services to offer free or discounted essentials.
* Accessibility: Ensured that Union staff have updated training in this area and worked to create inclusive community events, ensuring accessibility to all students
* Visibility: Led a voter registration drive and organised community-building events such as One World Week, aiming to increase the Union’s visibility and encourage student engagement
* Employability: Created volunteer and internship opportunities to provide students with practical experience in community and event engagement.

Upcoming Work & Plans

* Developing a partnership with local businesses to offer discounts for students
* Expanding community service opportunities, especially in environmentally focused projects

Union Future Priorities:

* Advocating for Students Regarding MySurrey Attendance
  + It was noted that it is important to advocate for students about the new compulsory attendance app and how the data will be used across the university. There will be ongoing talks with more senior staff regarding how the data from the app will be used and also highlight that students’ attendance shouldn’t hinder them from accessing specific parts of the course such as placements.
* Increase in Bookable Spaces
  + Currently there is departmental conflict about bookable music rooms, for example, so it is important to figure out a way to make these spaces available for all student performers.
* 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.
* 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.

**Topic of Discussion: Personal Tutors | Luana Vasconcelos**

The Union Forum discussed the role of personal tutors in supporting student well-being and success.

The following questions were asked:

* What are your expectations of your personal tutor?
* What do you think is good about the current programme?
* What do you think needs to be improved? If you could change anything in the current system, what would it be?
* How confident do you feel in approaching your personal tutor? Are there any situations you would not go to your personal tutor about?
* In an ideal world, what would your personal tutor look like to you?
* For international students: Do you have any thoughts on international-specific things regarding personal tutors, such as being obliged to meet with your personal tutor twice a year otherwise your visa could get revoked?
* Who would you go to instead of your personal tutor, when you need support?

The Officers shared their feedback in response to the questions.

**CLOSING ITEMS**

**Any Other Business:**

N/A