

Officer 2020 wrap up video transcript

Connor:

At the Students' Union we are all about students coming together and making stuff happen. In fact joining together is quite literally what the word union means! 2020 has been a pretty dodgy year and so a lot of what we do has had to change.

We might have spent more time in break out rooms than organising demonstrations or meeting in Falmer bar this term ...but we have never stopped bringing students together and making our collective voice heard (even if that is through a particularly tense Zoom call).

As we go into the winter break we wanted to share a bit of the stuff we have all been doing this term.

Democracy

Nehaal:

Over 2000 students have voted in a Students' Union election or referenda this term with almost 5000 votes cast.

We had two brilliant motions passed through referenda this term. One was concerning the First Generation Scholar Bursary which, over the past couple of years, has been defunded by the University. As a result of this referendum, we have a new campaigning policy in place to fight for the reinstatement of this bursary as well as its extension to postgraduate students.

Annie:

Our second winning referendum was to put a policy in place that mandates the SU to support student rent strikes in halls by default. This is particularly relevant as a new wave of student rent strikes have swept the UK since the start of the pandemic, with students in halls demanding more from University managements that brought them here. Both of these policies will stay in place for the next three years until Union Council will decide whether to put them back to referenda.

Shout-out to all the students that campaigned during the Autumn referenda, it's difficult to do all of this online but everyone did a fantastic job. The high turnout compared to previous years speaks for itself. We look forward to more referenda in the Spring term - if you're interested in putting something forward then don't hesitate to get in touch with one of us about your idea after Christmas!

Paris:

After our elections we now have 300 brilliant student reps in place who have been working hard to make sure that the views and concerns of their peers are brought to staff in their schools as well as Uni leadership. We know how difficult a year it is to be a student representative and we commend our reps who have made it through some fiery meetings and navigated- often confusing- university structures to improve learning environments and feed-in to the runnings of their courses.

We've had two Union Council sessions this term where councillors have listened to and scrutinised the work of officers as well as discussing key issues being faced by students and the role the SU must play in this. We'd like to thank councillors for being so engaged and helping to ensure our student democracy runs smoothly!

Ijlal:

Over the past few months, officers, staff and students have collaborated to set up Sussex Anti-Racist Action. This group is aiming to bring together a lot of the anti-racist work that is being done across the University into a collective campaign. We have looked at the ways in which institutional racism manifests at the University and have focused on five different areas: the Hostile Environment, Prevent, Awarding Gaps, Decolonisation, and Community and Radical Care. After holding a series of feed-in workshops with staff and students on each of these, we put together a manifesto specific to the University of Sussex. This was created with the voices of people from right across our community here at Sussex.

Recently, we had a launch event for this manifesto where each section was presented alongside the beautiful artwork designed by students. The SARA manifesto launch had over 70 people join us and we heard some incredible poetry readings and performances from students and racial justice campaigners. The event also ended with a call to action to demand that the University renew funding for the Race Equity Advocates programme, which was set to end this week. This programme pays students of colour to work within schools to tackle awarding gaps and create action plans to improve learning for black and brown students. They've done a difficult but brilliant job of this so far and we are pleased to announce that the university has since announced that this programme will be funded for the rest of the academic year.

Activities

Annie:

Without a doubt, this has been one of the hardest years for students in clubs and societies BUT we have been blown away by the creativity and commitment of our wonderful committees. We've had over 500 virtual events ran by our clubs and societies this term!

Back in September, we ran our first ever VIRTUAL Freshers' Fair which was a huge success with nearly 3500 students visiting, over 1000 interactions with societies, and over 200 society or club stalls. We are looking to host another of these for refreshers so look out for more info about this in January!

Our 3 student led committees have been meeting regularly during the first semester. Sports Reps have approved the creation of 2 new sports clubs for the Team Sussex community as well as overseeing a budget which has currently spent just over £2,000 for a range of items such as Facility Hire, Equipment and Water Sports.

Connor:

Societies Committee have currently approved bids totalling £1,300 which has covered a diverse range of things such as Software licences for Virtual Events, subsidising costs for students to take part in activities and partly funding fees for guest speakers. The Committee has also approved the creation of 22 new Societies so far this academic year! We love democracy.

Media Committee have approved spending totalling £3,000 which has been used to purchase some Podcasting Microphones 🎙️ virtual runway events as well as covering the cost of producing quality content for our community.

Nehaal:

We've had three Sports & Societies Assemblies so far where students involved in activities have come together to share skills, collaborate on events, and discuss the challenges of adjusting to online activities. These are held monthly and will continue into the new term so be sure to look out for them!

It seems like everyone being bored of lockdown online quizzes is a myth since we had 150 students take part in our University Challenge team trials! Big thanks to everyone that joined us and we look forward to putting a team together based on the results next term.

Annie:

AND If you somehow managed to miss our snazzy graphics and press release, you might not know about the South Coast Cup launched for next term! Sussex, Brighton, Chichester, and Portsmouth have joined up to offer competitive sporting fixtures throughout February and March. Leagues across twelve sports are due to be announced in the new year. As well as teams competing in leagues, universities will be competing for the overall South Coast Cup title with a points system determining the winning University at the end of the competition. A bit like varsity 2.0... It's really exciting to be able to announce something exciting after a really difficult term for clubs.

Buddy Scheme

Ijlal:

Our Buddy Scheme has had a record number of sign-ups this year with 778 new students and 274 new Buddy Scheme Volunteers. We know that student loneliness is a really big issue- especially this year- and we are thankful to everyone that has worked so hard to expand the Buddy Scheme and keep it running despite the online adjustments.

As well as this we've also held 9 Language Cafes with over **400 students attending!**

The post graduate network has also continued to hold online meet-ups with over 100 post grads attending and getting to know each other!

Campaigns and community

Nehaal:

Under the Sheets have run 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence - all via social media!

Access Sussex and our brilliant Students with Disabilities officer, Matt, have held several events and feed-in sessions for Disability History Month as well as starting an awareness campaign on social media to draw attention to invisible disabilities.

We've launched The Career Equity Project with the careers centre to support various student groups in gaining access to employment skills and opportunities (e.g

students with disabilities, student parents, international students etc etc). We've collaborated on events surrounding these topics and hope to further with these in the new year.

Paris:

Our new student sustainability committee has been set up with 12 amazing reps! We've heard from some fantastic new student societies and campaigns looking at both campus sustainability and climate justice in the community which we give our full support to and can't wait to get more involved with! As well as this, we are working with academics on a new sustainability module and hoping to work with rewilding soc to look at how our green spaces on campus can promote local biodiversity. With Sussex's Sustainability strategy being launched next Spring, our committee is going to be working with the university to make sure that this strategy is as radical and progressive as can be, and holding them to account where it isn't!

Community organisers have continued working with students having 1-1s and house meetings, some highlights include: the international student get together, student-parent coffee mornings, the Student Support Listening Project, LGBTQ+ meet-ups, getting a chaplain for Hindu students, and working on a BAME in academia project for students to express their experiences.

Ijlal:

We've also approved three new SU campaign applications: the Sussex Renters Union, the Undoing Borders campaign to support international students and resist the hostile environment in Higher Education, and the Green Energy Renters - a group seeking to join up climate justice and housing justice by campaigning for better quality, more sustainable housing.

Connor:

As well as this we've worked with students and staff on the Save our Catering Staff campaign which resulted in the 39 staff being threatened with redundancy being put onto furlough until March next year! This is a real testament to the power of student staff solidarity! The University has agreed to top up their furlough pay in December to 100% but we will still be campaigning to raise this to 100% in January, February and March.

Nehaal:

We've also worked with the Sussex Renters Union to support students organising the term two rent strike and have pushed for their concerns to be heard by University leadership. At the moment there are over 250 students signed up to the strike in January and we intend to work with these students to pressure the University into taking the concerns of students in university halls more seriously and meeting the five demands.

Annie:

We hope that you've enjoyed our Christmas wrap-up and look forward to seeing you all virtually or, hopefully, in person next term! Make sure that you come along to a members meeting, get in touch with one of the officers, submit a referenda, or run for one of the elected positions.

Paris:

The Union is a strange and beautiful democracy, one that is run by elected students. Alongside this we have a team of brilliant staff, who help facilitate the programs that students bring forward. Big up everyone involved in the union, students and staff, whether you voted in something or you're on the committee of one of our societies, you are part of keeping the SU going.

Happy holidays!