

Representation & Democracy

Your Voice at Kent



Vice President Welfare and Community: Thomas Freeston



Summary

After starting in July, it has been full steam ahead with lots of self-development and training to help me be effective in my role as a Sabbatical Officer. I have been introduced to key stakeholders from across the university and externally e.g., Kent Police and the Canterbury Safety Partnership etc. and have already started to establish strong working relationships. This academic year, as voted on by students during the Leadership Elections, I will be focusing on the following Student Priorities: **Mental Health Awareness and Support, Financial Support and Value for Money** (Cost of Living), as well as, collectively as an Officer Team, **Community and Belonging**. Despite simultaneously reacting to various challenges along the way such as Lambeth Conference, I have managed to make good progress on my Student Priorities to date.

Priority Progress

Summary	I am pleased to have made solid progress on my Student Priorities as well as other important initiatives (e.g., student safety etc.) so far. Furthermore, I have ensured to represent our diverse student body and their needs in various meetings, boards, and committees. Along the way, I have learnt many ways in which I can be more effective as your Vice President Welfare and Community which I plan to implement heading into the Spring term.
Progress	Financial Support and Value for Money (Cost of Living): <ul style="list-style-type: none">Renamed the Foodbank at Kent Union to Campus Pantry to help elevate some of the perceived stigma attached to accessing short term food supplies.Created and launched the Cost-of-Living survey alongside the University and in partnership with The Food Foundation. The survey will Kent Union and the University of Kent understand how the cost-of-living crisis is impacting students and how we can best support them during their time at Kent, as well as achieve other aims. So far, the survey has had 570 students respond to it. Alongside the survey, we are planning to conduct focus groups too.Filmed and released social media content with our Marketing team to raise awareness of our useful finance and budgeting tool Blackbullion to help students develop financial confidence,

knowledge, skills and to empower them to make better decision making.

- Addressed over 50+ local landlords at the **National Landlord Association Conference** regarding the £400 energy rebate and ensuring they pass on that saving to students with all-inclusive bill packages.
- Organised and hosted a **Housemate Hunting event** with CCL and our Advice Service helping students find housemates but also providing students with a housing checklist which will enable them to know their rights and equip them with useful questions to ask landlords to find a good quality property that is affordable and within their budget.

Mental Health Awareness and Support:

- Led a successful **World Mental Health Day (WMHD)** in collaboration with Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW). This involved filming a campaign video for Kent Union and the University asking for and sharing students' self-care tips. Additionally, I helped raise awareness of the mental health services available to students whilst out and about during the WMHD event that took place on Templeman Library Lawn.
- Successfully lobbied SSW to implement an **Eating Disorder Drop-In** into the Nursing Service to provide students with an eating disorder access to vital primary support and services such as a medical information and referral guidance to the National Health Service. I will be now involved in discussing the next steps in its implementation.
- Lead **November** with Vice-President Student Engagement Carolina to raise awareness of men's mental health, suicide, prostate cancer and testicular cancer through various events and social media.

Community and Belonging:

- Supported our LGBTQ+ community during the **Lambeth Conference** by attending the Lambeth Walk to show solidarity with our queer students and staff at Kent. As well as working with our Marketing Team and the universities Comms team to ensure we promote the support available to students during this time.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Formed a Loneliness and Belonging Working Group with representatives from College and Community Life (CCL), SSW, Medway, as well as Divisions, to discuss initiatives to tackle loneliness and build communities.
Next Steps	<p>Financial Support and Value for Money (Cost of Living):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will be working with The Food Foundation to analyse the Cost-of-Living survey results to present at a Cost-of-Living Taskforce in the Spring Term. Additionally, I will be working with both Kent Union's and the universities Comms team to close the feedback loop for students. Finally, I will be using the findings from both the survey and focus groups to lobby the university to implement more initiatives that students would like to see to support them during this crisis.• I plan to finalise my proposal and implement a policy to ensure that financial difficulties are considered for extenuating and mitigating circumstances in coursework and assessments.• I will be working with Zaid to review on-campus accommodation prices for 2023-24. <p>Mental Health Awareness and Support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working on an Eating Disorder campaign with Rise and Recover. Next steps include filming content for our awareness campaign video, creating educational social media graphics, focusing on and reinforcing body positive messages as well as organising various events and fundraisers for Beats.• Explore more ways in which we can improve wellbeing services and support for students.• Working with SSW and the universities Comms Team to promote Spectrum Life, an out of hours mental health app for students, and it's cost of living wellbeing support.• Working with Zaid on the Mental Health Charter submission in the Spring term. <p>Community and Belonging:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide information (and host events) regarding the support available for students over the Christmas period. We know that for

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	<p>students such as estranged or care leaver and those from the LGBTQ+ community, who might be going back home to unsupportive homes, that Christmas can be rather difficult.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage and work with students of faith to ensure that they feel adequately represented and that they have access to spaces on campus in which they can use for prayer and worship.
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What else I've been working on

Summary	<p>Whilst I have been busy making solid progress on my Student Priorities, I have also been involved in various other projects and campaigns throughout the Autumn Term that I'm very passionate about.</p>
Progress	<p>Student Safety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Led Safety Week at Kent Union which aimed to raise awareness of the various initiatives and tools to keep students safe, particularly with the clock's going back and it getting darker earlier. This involved an Instagram live with Respect The No on consent and how to be an active bystander. Attending various safety events and initiatives such as the Night Time Safety Tour to review the CCTV and lighting around the Canterbury campus. Town Takeover Safety Hub to provide safety information and resources to Canterbury residence. On the Law, Society, Social Justice Division and Respect The No – Consent Get It panel discussing all things safety. Leading Kent Union's involvement with the Safe Night Out campaign, which is an initiative funded by Safer Streets 4 – governmental funding secured by the Community Safety Partnership, to run a media campaign as well as expand initiatives such as Ask Angela, anti-spike lids for drinks bottles etc. I sat on the recruitment panel for a Specialist Wellbeing Advisor for Bullying, Discrimination and Hate Incidents. I will be working with them to implement a zero-tolerance campaign to bullying, discrimination and hate incidents to compliment the universities existing Consent Get It campaign to sexual harassment and misconduct. <p>Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Led Black History Month at Kent Union celebrating black culture/excellence whilst also recognising the contributions and achievements of those from African or Caribbean heritage. We helped organise a panel discussion, canvas painting, black owned business fair and more. • Leading Disability History Month at Kent Union which we had an Inspirational Talk from Millie Knight – Paralympian Skier and Commonwealth Karate World Champion, Accessible Sports sessions as well generally raising awareness of disability. • Supporting the Women’s, Accessibility and LGBTQ+ Network in all their activities and events. As well as helping them to create the change they want to see on campus.
<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Student Safety:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on tackling the ongoing issue with campus security and their interaction with black students, working alongside our Black Student Voices researchers to take tangible steps in the right direction. • Working on the Safe Night Out campaign and particularly using the budget set aside for non-drinking events and initiatives for societies. <p>Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on Kent’s Black 365 approach by continuing to celebrate black excellence, work with our majority black student groups and co-create initiatives to improve the black experience at Kent. • Working on LGBTQ+ History Month planning for February.

Representing Students at University Meetings

<p>Meetings attended</p>	<p>Universities Joint Communications Meeting (Canterbury): Working with Christ Church Uni and the University of the Creative Arts on Canterbury wide comms relating to safety, drink spiking, consent and the cost of living.</p>
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Cost of Living Taskforce: Advocating for students and ensuring that cost of living information is centralised to make it easier for students to find support. As well as ensuring there are affordable food options on campus.

Canterbury Purple Flag Steering Group: A group including representatives from CCSU, KU, UoK, CCCU, Canterbury City Council, Kent Police, Street Pastors and managers and owners of various businesses that operate in the nighttime economy. Discussing important initiatives to make Canterbury safer.

Education and Student Experience Board: Discussed important academic and student experience issues. In particular, regarding the Attendance Monitoring Update, I raised the importance of informing students that they have the option to go part-time rather than solely recommending intermission.

Student Experience Committee: Discussing important topics from the National Student Survey to Kent Union's Student Priorities etc.

EDI Operations: Discussing important updates relating to equity, diversity and inclusion such as challenging racism, accessibility, religious observance guidance etc.

Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team: A member of the RECSAT which is a team of individuals across the institution that deliberate, comment, and make direction to matters relating to the strategic direction of what the institution should do and who should do it in relation to the Race Equality Charter. I discussed the importance of ensuring that recruitment panels are diverse to ensure that is representative and unbiased.

Higher Education/Further Education Operations Group Meeting: Discussing how Kent Police and the Canterbury Safety Partnerships plan to engage with students during Welcome Week and raise awareness of existing safety initiatives. As well as hearing a local policing update.