

Student Council Officer Updates – 2nd April

➤ President – Rohit Mahadevu

1. Enhancing Campus Catering Affordability and Choice

Informed by robust student feedback gathered at the start of the term, comprising over 1,190 responses, Rohit led the development of a comprehensive paper highlighting students' concerns around affordability and choice in campus catering. This paper was presented to both the Campus Commercial team and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE). By benchmarking food prices across other universities and using comparative data, he advocated for more accessible, healthy, and inclusive options, including vegetarian, vegan, and non-vegetarian meals. A key part of his recommendation focused on enhancing affordability, with detailed discussions around current university food subsidies and strategic improvements. The next step involves working closely with university decision-makers to implement these recommendations and ensure equitable access to nutritious food on campus.

2. AI Policy Reform and Student Literacy Development

As part of his strategic action plan, Rohit undertook a critical review of the university's AI policy. Recognising the growing role of AI in education, he advocated for clear, student-friendly communication around its responsible use. Drawing on best practices from across the sector, he rephrased key policy elements into accessible language and consolidated findings into a two-page HSU Recommendations Paper. This was presented to key academic committees, including ASAC, ESEC, and AEG. As a result of persistent lobbying and collaboration, Rohit successfully influenced the development of a revised AI policy set to launch next term, which supports students in becoming AI-literate and confident in using these tools responsibly. Additionally, he lobbied for the creation of a cross-functional AI steering committee with student representation from both undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts, ensuring regular policy review and adaptation to the fast-evolving AI landscape.

3. Improving UNO Bus Services and Student Experience

Following significant student concerns raised through emails, PVC meetings, and student forums, Rohit in collaboration with Pavan – Commuting Students' Officer launched a dedicated UNO Bus Survey, gathering over 490 responses. This allowed for the identification of recurring themes, including inconsistent shuttle services, driver conduct, and unreliable app updates. The findings were reported to the university, with immediate action requested, including improved communications and real-time updates on the UNO Bus App. Additionally, he pushed for increased visibility and updates on digital signage at bus stops, collaborating with the university and local councils to share live data. Student concerns continue to be raised regularly with UNO representatives, with a focus on overcrowding and safety at key campus stops. Ensuring ongoing accountability remains a priority.

4. Expanding Student Employment and Career Opportunities

Understanding the urgent need for accessible part-time roles, graduate schemes, and placement opportunities, Rohit initiated high-level discussions with representatives from the Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, and St Albans Council. With support from the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor, he proposed a collaborative model to channel local employment opportunities, particularly from micro and small enterprises, into the university's Career Centre. While discussions are in early stages, this partnership aims to bridge the gap between local industry and the student community, ultimately increasing access to employment opportunities that align with students' academic and professional goals.

5. Enhancing Student-Focused University Communications

Rohit actively collaborated with various university departments to enhance the clarity and tone of communications sent to students. One notable success was his work with the Student Finance team, where he helped shift communication strategies towards a more empathetic and student-friendly tone. Additionally, he advocated for clearer guidance on managing financial obligations and promoted

educational resources to help students navigate debt and budgeting challenges effectively. Other student communications have been reviewed, with a focus on making them more accessible and student friendly.

6. Strengthening Support for Late-Arriving Students

A review was conducted by Rohit to assess the support provided to late-arriving students, particularly in the HBS and SPECS schools. Through coordinated efforts with academic and administrative staff, he ensured that these students received the additional academic and wellbeing support necessary to transition smoothly and feel integrated into the university community.

7. Advocating for Academic Support and Balanced Workloads

Working closely with the university's academic leadership, particularly the UH Class initiative and Pro Vice-Chancellor Charmayne Barnes, Rohit has ensured that student academic feedback is actively listened to and meaningfully actioned. Drawing insights from mid-module evaluations, course-level feedback, and broader academic surveys, he engaged with students across various schools and attended multiple course-specific meetings to gather direct input. This feedback was reviewed collaboratively with the PVC and academic teams to identify recurring concerns, including the bunching of assignment deadlines, inconsistent course delivery, limited course-specific support, and delayed staff responses. Rohit has actively advocated for improvements in these areas, leading to enhanced dialogue between students and staff, greater responsiveness from academic teams, and increased awareness within the university of the importance of balanced assessment schedules and timely support. By continuously monitoring feedback and maintaining a student-centred approach, he is working to enhance the academic experience and promote a more supportive, transparent, and effective learning environment across all schools.

8. Launching a TEDx Event to Inspire Students

To celebrate the achievements of alumni and inspire current students, Rohit successfully secured a TEDx licence and is leading the organisation of a TEDx event at the university on 25th April at the Weston Auditorium. The event will feature distinguished alumni sharing their personal and professional journeys, offering valuable insights and fostering a culture of aspiration and resilience. This initiative represents a significant milestone in creating a platform for meaningful storytelling and community engagement.

9. Strengthening Partnerships with Local Councils and MPs

As part of a wider civic engagement strategy, Rohit initiated dialogue with local council representatives and invited them to the university for collaboration discussions. He contributed to policy discussions by submitting a position paper on the Renters' Rights Bill, advocating for stronger protections and more equitable housing conditions for students. Additionally, he is in the process of arranging a campus visit from the local MP, with the aim of strengthening partnerships between the student union, the university, and government bodies to amplify student voices and explore future opportunities.

➤ International Students' officer – Parsha Kella

1. Assessing Employability Support for International Students in the UK

Parsha has initiated the first stage of research, gathering information from Career Services on their existing employability support for international students, in collaboration with the Careers and Employment team. Parsha is now working on drafting a structured survey to facilitate targeted conversations. Following this, discussions with international students will begin through one-to-one interviews and peer discussions to document their experiences, challenges, and perspectives on the UK job market. These qualitative insights will be analysed to identify recurring themes, barriers, and gaps in the current support services. The findings will be compiled into a structured case study and submitted to relevant stakeholders, including next year's officer, to contribute to long-term improvements in career and employment services for international students.

2. Improving International Students' Orientation and Support Awareness

Parsha is currently assessing all the resources provided to international students upon their arrival at Herts. This includes reviewing the services offered at the school level to evaluate how beneficial and accessible they are to students. Feedback on the "Getting Started at Herts" programme is also being gathered to assess its impact and determine whether it should be made a compulsory part of the international students' welcome kit. Efforts are underway to enhance the content to better support international students, ensuring the revised materials are ready for the September 2025 intake.

➤ **Mature Students' Officer – Deepak Vishwakarma**

1. Enhancing Pregnancy Support for Students: Policy Review and Advocacy

Deepak has reviewed pregnancy policies at universities comparable to Herts and identified several gaps in our own policy. He is currently drafting recommendations for the Dean of Students, focusing on policy changes to enhance academic accessibility for pregnant students. To ensure a comprehensive approach, he is collaborating with students and the Advice & Support Team to gather insights into the real-time challenges faced by pregnant students. These concerns will be incorporated into his recommendations to ensure they address practical difficulties. Once finalised, Deepak will meet with the Dean of Students to advocate for policy improvements, emphasising the need for a more empathetic and supportive approach towards pregnant students.

2. Enhancing Mature Student Engagement: Understanding Needs and Shaping Future Events

Deepak is currently engaging with a few mature students to gain initial insights into their event and engagement preferences. By identifying common themes in their feedback, he aims to establish a central idea around the key challenges and opportunities. Once these insights are structured, he will develop targeted survey questions to gather more comprehensive feedback from mature students later this month. The findings will then be compiled into a case study, outlining key issues and recommendations. This case study will be passed on to next year's officers to help them design events that better align with the interests and needs of mature students.

➤ **Women Students' Officer – Kesar Dave**

1. Period Product Accessibility in Washrooms

Kesar Dave has successfully lobbied for the installation of period product dispensing machines, including in newly built locations like the SPECTRA building. The addition of these machines has been agreed upon by the Estates team, and Kesar is now working on confirming the exact locations and installation dates. She plans to follow up with the Estates team to get more details and ensure timely installation. Kesar is also collecting feedback from students to measure satisfaction and assess the availability of period products in washrooms across campus.

2. Women's Networking Sip and Paint Event

Kesar successfully organised the Women's Networking Sip and Paint event, celebrating International Women's Day on March 6th. The event saw an excellent turnout with over 100 students participating in various activities. Another Sip and Paint event was held on March 20th, led by Kesar. Feedback has been collected from attendees to understand the impact of these events on women's community building and to address any issues. Kesar is now reviewing this feedback to identify any key concerns raised by the female students and to improve future events.

3. Collaboration on Mandatory Consent Training

Kesar has reached out to the UH Wellbeing team to better understand the status of consent training initiatives. Although the mandatory training programme is currently only available for staff, Kesar is in discussions to explore ways to make this training accessible to students as well. She is committed to ensuring that this training reflects diverse perspectives and aligns with the university's goals of fostering a safe, inclusive campus. Kesar will continue her collaboration with the UH Wellbeing team to promote this initiative to students and ensure its successful implementation.

➤ **Campus Based Students' Officer – Krishna Singh**

1. Lobbying for More Food Options and Budget-Friendly Meals

Krishna is currently working on collaborating with Aramark to make food on campus more affordable, accessible, and reflective of the diverse student population. He has already received numerous requests from students for a change in the menu. Following a motion passed at the last student council meeting for more fresh produce on campus, Krishna worked with Aramark to introduce a wider variety of fruits and vegetables around campus. He is also conducting GOATing sessions to gather student feedback, which will help advocate for further improvements and better eating spaces. Krishna will measure the success of these initiatives by gathering feedback through a follow-up survey at the end of the semester.

2. Improving Feelings of Safety on Campus

Krishna is working closely with the ResLife, Pinnacle, and Uliving teams to address concerns around campus safety, particularly within the School of Law and Education. Following low safety scores reported in Herts Unfiltered, Krishna has been actively reviewing the feedback and developing a communication strategy to handle security-related discussions. He has collaborated with ResLife to organise a student drop-in session to meet students personally and understand their concerns. Krishna has also been instrumental in ensuring that faulty lock issues raised earlier in the year were promptly resolved, with new locks installed across campus. Additionally, he has been advocating for workshops focused on staying safe on campus, with a focus on further patrols and signposting relevant services.

3. Addressing Loneliness and Lack of Belonging

Krishna is currently working on addressing issues related to loneliness and lack of belonging raised by students in campus halls. He is engaging in conversations with students to better understand the root causes of these feelings, providing them with a platform to voice their concerns. Krishna is working on developing action plans based on the feedback received, aiming to improve the overall student experience and foster a stronger sense of community in the halls.

➤ **LGBTQ+ Students' Officer – Zhora Jasper**

1. Improving Access to Sanitary Products and Gender-Neutral Toilets

Zhora has been advocating for the availability of sanitary products and gender-neutral toilets across campus. In January, she engaged with Estates and other officers to discuss these issues, but budget constraints from Estates led to most of her proposals being rejected. As a result, she was advised to pause this initiative and focus on the LGBTQ+ History Month events. However, Estates has confirmed the installation of new period product vending machines, and Zhora is waiting for confirmation on their exact locations. Once received, she will review whether the placements meet student needs and continue lobbying for further improvements if required.

2. Advocating for a Harm-Reduction Approach to Drug Policy

In her efforts to push for a harm-reduction approach to drug policy, Zhora has been conducting research by reviewing policies from other universities and gathering best practices. She has identified that other institutions take a more supportive and gentle approach compared to the stricter stance at Herts. Currently, she is finalizing her research and plans to compile it into a systematic paper to support her lobbying efforts.

3. Strengthening LGBTQ+ Society and Pride Representation

Zhora has played a key role in reviving the LGBTQ+ Society, which was dormant at the start of the year, and has supported the successful relaunch of the Queer and Trans support groups, which were well received by students last year. Attendance in these support groups has remained consistent, and she continues to assist the society in any further initiatives they plan. Additionally, she is actively working with EDI to restore Herts' representation at the London Pride Parade in July and will ensure students are kept updated on all developments regarding the university's involvement.

4. Trans Transition Action Plan

Zhora is working with the university's EDI team to improve support for transitioning trans students. The team was already drafting a policy and requested her insights to refine it. She identified key gaps in the existing policy and successfully lobbied for improvements to make the transition process more supportive. Her suggestions were welcomed and accepted by EDI. Currently, the policy is being drafted, and Zhora has requested that the first draft be shared with students for feedback. She is now waiting for updates on this process.

➤ **Commuting Students' Officer – Pavan Polimuri**

1. UNO Bus Forum and Student Feedback

Following significant student concerns raised through emails, PVC meetings, and student forums, Pavan launched the UNO Bus review, which was live in January and February, gathering over 490 responses. This allowed for the identification of recurring themes, including inconsistent shuttle services, driver conduct, and unreliable app updates. Pavan is currently working on ensuring student voices are heard, and a UNO Bus Forum is being planned in collaboration with the Uno bus and Officer team. The forum will present these recurring issues and drive actionable changes with UNO management, with targeted communication to encourage student participation in the forum.

2. Raising Awareness of UNO Bus App and Services

To help students make the most of the UNO bus services, Pavan is working on plans to improve awareness through social media content, in-person outreach, and clear communication at bus stops. This includes better signage for app and ticket usage, as well as collaboration with the Ask Herts team to make commuting resources easily accessible. Additionally, efforts will be made to inform students about discounted ticket zones, ensuring they can take advantage of cost-saving options.

3. Improving Student-Driver Interaction

Recognizing the importance of respectful communication between students and bus drivers, Pavan is currently working on enhancing mutual understanding by collaborating with UNO management on driver training sessions and student awareness initiatives. Student testimonials and direct feedback will be crucial in identifying key concerns. These insights will be presented at the UNO Bus Forum, alongside recommendations for improving interactions between drivers and students.

➤ **Black Students' Officer – Hassan Wasswa**

1. Celebrating Black Culture and Addressing Mental Health Needs

Hassan is currently working on collaborating with societies such as the East African Society, Ghana Nigeria Society, African Caribbean Society, and others to celebrate Black culture and heritage. The initial steps include planning cultural meet-and-greets to foster cross-society engagement and unity. Additionally, discussions are in progress to advocate for more culturally sensitive mental health and wellness events tailored to the specific needs of Black students. Efforts are also being made to push for the recruitment of more diverse counselling staff and ensure that all mental health resources reflect the cultural needs of Black students. These initiatives will be further developed in collaboration with student societies and university departments.

2. Strengthening Zero-Tolerance Policies on Racism and Cyberbullying:

Hassan is also advocating for an increased understanding of disabilities within the university community. The initial steps include pushing for regular disability awareness training, with a focus on neurodiversity and invisible disabilities, to be offered at least once per term. He is exploring partnerships with student societies to create platforms for sharing stories and achievements, promoting inclusion and understanding. Additionally, Hassan has begun discussions with mental health services to push for tailored and accessible support programs for disabled students.

➤ **Disabled Students' Officer – Lorena Navea**

1. Accessibility Improvements for Learning Materials and Campus Spaces

Lorena Navea is currently working on lobbying for improvements to learning materials, classrooms, and campus spaces to make them more accessible for disabled students. She has been in discussions with Senior Lecturers and the EDI team about the disability allyship scheme, which focuses on training staff to become better prepared for inclusive teaching. Lorena collaborated with students to prepare a set of 10 recommendations, which have been submitted and approved. She is now awaiting the next steps. Additionally, Lorena met with the LCS team, where she was introduced to the available facilities for disabled students. The LRC has offered to organise a seminar to promote these services, which Lorena supports and plans to hold this seminar along with a BSL learning day.

2. Expanding Access to Assistive Technology

Lorena is working on expanding access to assistive technology and resources for disabled students, with a particular focus on international students who currently do not have the same access to assistive learning technologies as home students. Lorena has conducted research on universities that provide such facilities for international disabled students and is now working to implement similar provisions. She is collaborating with the university to increase awareness of assistive technologies, such as screen readers and speech-to-text tools, and plans to organise workshops and events each semester to promote these resources for the next year. Lorena also aims to establish a clear process for students to access these technologies, ensuring timely support and reducing wait times.

3. Advocating for a Stronger Disabled Student Community

Lorena has been advocating for increased understanding of disabilities within the university community and for improved mental health resources tailored to disabled students. She is working with the Disabled Voices and Allies Society, which is now active in planning a games night, with the date yet to be confirmed. Lorena continues to work with student societies and mental health services to develop platforms for sharing stories, fostering inclusion, and pushing for tailored mental health support for disabled students. She aims to measure success through participation rates and feedback from students.