



Ideas to improve your Union, University and City

Better University Agenda, 16/03/2021, Zoom (Online) [5.30-7.30pm]

1. Apologies for absence
2. The discussion of each Idea in turn:
 - a. The Student who submitted the Idea (or a nominated spokesperson) to explain what they want and why
 - b. Clarifications, questions, comments and change proposals from Forum attendees
 - c. The Forum Facilitator to establish if the Student Panel are able to make a decision
 - d. Secret ballot of the Student Panel
3. Announcements and reports from two Student Executive Officers detailing progress with regard to implementation of Policy and allowing questions from Forum attendees
4. Announcements and reports from Forum attendees / AOB
5. Announcement of Student Panel Verdict(s).

Name: Katherine Padmore

Your Better University Idea: Should the University enforce mandatory recording of lectures for disabled students?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

I'm a disabled student and I'm incredibly frustrated at how often lecturers refuse to record lectures (pre-COVID) due to the lack of need from the wider student body. I want to ensure that, after COVID, all lectures are recorded and made available to students in disability services so equality isn't an optional thing for lecturers to do when they're bothered. The uni should support lecturers in making this happen, and hold them accountable when it doesn't.

Name: Vanessa Ngoshan Lo

Your Better University Idea: Should the Skills@Library in the University provide more academic support to students?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

The Skills@Library provides a wide range of resources to students who would like to develop their academic skills and offers 1-1 appointments to students who are in need of academic support. This is beneficial to students' learning journey in terms of enhancing their academic writing and preparing their research project, because students will have the opportunity to receive 1-1 support and receive more guidance on improving the quality of their work.

In particular, the individual support is extremely useful for students who struggle with Maths and Statistics. For example, a number of students reported that they experience difficulties in using



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statistical software for data analysis or they may find it very difficult to understand different types of statistical methods from reading the textbook.

However, each student is only permitted to have up to three sessions per semester. While appreciating the extra support provided by the university, a maximum of three sessions may not be deemed as desirable to deliver a good level of support to students who struggle academically, especially for students with special educational needs who are more likely to require more dedicated support in relation to their studies. Therefore, the university should ensure sufficient academic support for students and increase up to five 1-1 sessions per semester.

Name: Franks Feng

Your Better University Idea: Should the University provide academic language and academic literacies support for all students in all faculties?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

Encouraging students, especially international students, to get involved with campus life is one of the university's priorities. Every year we have students who are not confident in their use of academic language and need support with developing their academic literacies; this not only leads to a weaker performance in terms of their assessed work, but also negatively impacts on their experience of university life, their sense of belonging to the institution and their willingness to interact with home students.

Because of this, it is important that all faculties embed academic literacies and academic language development within all taught programmes, in joint collaboration with the Library's Learning Services Team and the Language Centre, alongside appropriate promotion of co-curricular, optional support for students to self-select.

Name: Kayla Kemhadjian

Your Better University Idea: Should the Doctoral College offer Funded Extensions to Self-Funded PhDs?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

The Doctoral College has acknowledged that COVID-19 has interrupted PhD progress to the point where most students will have to go into the 4th year of their PhD due to COVID disruptions:

- lack of access to research resources and facilities;
- interruption of data collection and/or fieldwork;
- increased caring responsibilities;
- disability or health (including mental health) condition.

They have offered a pot of money for students to apply for funded extensions - but only to those who were already funded. As of the 9th of Feb 2021, the Doctoral College has finally offered support for self-funded students in the form of a one-off £500 grant. While this is a great first step,



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the three-month funded extension offered to funded students is worth £1,200 a month (for a total of £3,600). This means that while the Doctoral College is offering self-funded students some support, and acknowledging that they need it, the support on offer is a 7th of what they are giving other PhD students. Clearly, there is still a great disparity in the support on offer.

Other universities like York, Southampton, and LSE have all offered support to PGRs in the form of funded extensions whether a student is funded or not. Self-funded students at other universities have been given either a funded 3-month extension or tuition reimbursement at a percentage that covers the cost of a three - 6-month extension. The University of Leeds should follow this precedent and offer a funded extension to all PhD students regardless of funding or fee status (i.e., to Internationals, Home and EU students - self-funded or not). This should either be in the form of a grant or a tuition reimbursement so that all PhD students can finish their degree without entering economic hardship because of the University's closure.

Name: Charlotte Morton

Your Better University Idea: Should the University make the process for leaving university accommodation more accessible, transparent, and fair?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

A more visible and accessible process for students who wish to leave their university accommodation contract. Some flexibility has been offered to students during the pandemic and I believe this flexibility should be offered in a 'normal' year to those students who experience special circumstances. The university should adopt a panel model, to include an exec officer and advice team staff member from LUU, to consider applications to leave residences. The process for applying should be made visible and readily available to students who feel they have a special case for contractual release.

The pandemic has highlighted the inflexibility of rental contracts that are offered by the university. Whilst some students have been released from their contracts, many have been held to their tenancy agreements even in situations where they have moved home to take on caring responsibilities, are severely struggling with their physical and mental health, and have been prevented from travelling to the UK by restrictions. Students that wish to leave their residences are faced with two options: drop out of university entirely, or find an external tenant to replace them in their contract. No student should have no choice but to leave university entirely, as finding an alternative tenant is an incredibly lengthy and stressful process, especially for a student who is already in difficult circumstances. I believe that as the university is in the financial position to offer this flexibility, it is their duty to ease the burden of their students who are struggling and make this process as visible and easy as possible.

Name: Chloe Davison

Your Better University Idea: Should the University encourage students to display pronouns on University accounts?



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What do you want? / Why do you want it?

Creating an inclusive university environment is something I regard to be of chief importance. Under the umbrella term of inclusivity, lies gender inclusivity.

In my opinion, the University should actively encourage students to display their pronouns on their university accounts - forename surname (pronoun/pronoun) - and email footers. My reasoning is as follows:

Making presenting your pronouns a thing that most students do makes transgender people feel less singled-out, creating greater inclusivity. When I have spoken to some of my Trans friends before, they have told me that often when informing people of their pronouns (especially those that identify outside of the gender binaries and perhaps use they/them) this comes with a lot of unnecessary fuss. Asking all students to provide their pronouns normalises not making assumptions and also normalises asking people of their pronouns. This normalisation creates a safer / more respectful environment.

I propose that the university actively encourage students who are comfortable in doing so to include their pronouns in a number of ways:

- Staff, who are comfortable doing so, should be actively encouraged to have their pronouns attached to their name on digital platforms that the University uses and in the footer of their email. Students should hopefully take lead from their educators.
- Email sent out to all students informing them of how to change their name on different digital platforms the University uses - with clear visual instructions.
- Have information regarding updating your display name on all digital platforms used by the University on the website. This is essential for students who may want to change their pronouns mid-way through their university experience.

If we were to take up this idea, we would not be the only university. I have spoken to friends at other universities who have shared that their universities have already implemented this idea. At Newcastle University, student's pronouns appear when they join online lectures and, alongside University of Liverpool, all staff have their pronouns included in their email footer.

Particularly during online learning, where we may be thrown into break out rooms with people we don't know, it's important that we stay mindful of things like pronouns. Including pronouns in zoom names and email footers would be such a small but impactful move.

Name: Molly Lawrenson

Your Better University Idea: Should the University have a counsellor trained in how to deal with young people who are suffering / suffered from intimate partner violence?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

[Intimate partner violence/ abuse means domestic abuse that occurs within a romantic relationship]

The University needs to have a counsellor properly trained in how to deal with young abuse victims and survivors. From my research, I know 16-19 year olds are the most likely age group to suffer from intimate partner violence, with 14% of 16-19 year olds suffering from intimate partner abuse.



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However, 20-23 year olds are the second most likely, with 5.3% of them suffering in silence. Both of these age groups make up 87% of University of Leeds student cohort, so it would be irresponsible for the University not to implement these changes, as the majority of students at the University make up the most 'at risk' categories of suffering from abuse.

But I am not the only one who has recognised the problem. I asked University of Leeds students a couple of questions to further illustrate the problem. We asked:

'Do you think domestic abuse happens at University?'- 85.4% said 'Yes'.

'Did the person/ yourself go through an abusive relationship/ suffered from the effects of abuse whilst at University?'- 60.7% said 'Yes'.

'Do you know what support (if any) is available at the University for those suffering from domestic abuse/ the effects of domestic abuse?'- 82% said 'No'. Those who answered 'Yes' made comments like 'a complaint procedure that can be more traumatic than helpful'.

Finally, we asked 'Do you think the University could do more to support students who suffer/ have suffered from domestic violence?' 96.6% said 'No'.

Clearly, this is a problem that is silenced. By not having a counsellor properly trained, by not having emails/ social media posts/ posters signposting people to where they can get help, how is this problem ever going to be resolved?

The solution to the problem is easy. Properly train staff with SafeLives specialist training on how to deal with young people in an abusive relationship, and those who have previously suffered. Then the University must include domestic abuse service links as part of their 'welfare emails' that they have been sending since the start of the pandemic, as well as posting it on the University's social media and Minerva. On top of that, posters should be up around the University, especially in more discreet places, like behind toilet stools, so people can access the information privately.

This is a necessary change and would only be a small amount of the budget, considering two women every fortnight die from intimate partner violence. Young people are absolutely not excluded from that statistic.

Name: Vanessa Ngoshan Lo

Your Better University Idea: Should the University provide more mental health and counselling services for struggling students?

What do you want? / Why do you want it?

The Student Counselling & Wellbeing Service provides counselling and psychotherapy services to students who are struggling with mental health issues. This is a free service provided to struggling students with a maximum of four sessions per academic year. Psychotherapists can help address the underlying causes of students' problems as well as providing psychological interventions to students. This is very helpful as students will have the opportunity for disclosing private matters to an individual and receiving specialists help if needed.



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Since last year, many students have been facing a number of life challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These events are likely to have continuous, detrimental effects on students' wellbeing. This may be due to the change of students' learning experience adding concerns about their academic developments. In addition to the impact of stress and social isolation, students are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, and emotional distress. It means that students may require more than four sessions per academic year to cope with ongoing, stressful circumstances.

During this difficult period of time, a number of students already reported having consistent emotional distress triggered by remote learning and life events. Students are now in a very vulnerable state, and have high risks of developing mental health disorders if not receiving appropriate psychological support to adapt to this unusual students' life. Hence, it is imperative that the university should increase funds to the mental wellbeing department and provide more therapeutic services to struggling students.