

Candidate Question Time - VP Wellbeing & Diversity

Kate Roberts 06:36

Hi everyone, and welcome to our third night of candidate question time. My name is Kate Roberts, your current President, my pronouns are she her, and I'll be your host tonight and across the week. I'm joined by Phill Dowler, our Democracy Coordinator, he'll be supporting me with tech tonight. We're currently live on zoom and Facebook, and we'll be recording this evening to be uploaded to YouTube.

Kate Roberts 06:58

Last night, we got to hear from candidates running for the position of Vice President Societies and Sports. Tonight however, we'll be focusing on candidates for the role of Vice President Wellbeing and Diversity. We'll just take a moment to run through how the evening will work.

Kate Roberts 07:12

In each segment, candidates will take it in turns to start off with an opening statement. Once each candidate has made their statement we will move on to questions. Questions were pre submitted by students over the last few weeks. And each question will be asked to all candidates at that role. And candidates will have a set period of time to respond. Time will start once candidates begin speaking. And if candidates continue to speak beyond reason, after the indicator has gone red, the candidate will be muted.

Kate Roberts 07:39

Now with that I would like to welcome candidates for the role of Vice President Wellbeing on Diversity.

Alice Goode 07:53

Oh, hello.

Kate Roberts 07:55

Awesome.

Alice Finnegan 07:56

Hey.

Kate Roberts 07:57

So we're joined this evening by Alice Finnegan, and Alice Goode, thank you so much for joining us, we're going to move right into opening statements in alphabetical order by surname, and you'll have three minutes to make your opening statement and time will begin once you start speaking. So this means that we'll be starting with Alice Finnegan, over to you.

Alice Finnegan 08:19

Okay. Hi, everyone. My name is Alice Finnegan, and I'm running to be your VP of Welfare and Diversity. So the reason I'm running is to change the culture of Royal Holloway, I know that kind of sounds crazy. But I think that the policies that I will implement will actually make a difference. The core of my campaign is to change the university from business oriented to student led. So I believe that a university that has students at its core and can only run because of its students, should really have students running that university, whereas at the moment is very much based on monetary gain. So I want to change the way that the university looks at welfare, you know, we have a good system in place, but it's very retroactive, and I would like to change it to proactive so at the moment, it kind of only deals with welfare, once you have a problem, and I want to deal with it at the source. And I think that a lot of stress starts with academia. So I'll be working super closely with the VP of Education, hopefully, whoever that turns out to be. Um, and we have a like super diverse community at Royal Holloway. And I want to ensure that student representative roles are filled and represent that community. So at the moment, only really, academic roles are filled like the BAME Collective, the LGBT+ Collective and Disabled Collectives, those roles aren't really pushed, and I think that's just unacceptable. Like we need that representation, so that students have someone to turn to and identify with. So yeah, the more that the community have a say in the way that the university has run the Edit, it will be basically. And obviously, I know I come from a privileged position, but I can use that privilege to benefit others and get the representation that they deserve. And it will be my job to hold everyone accountable to hold all of the VPs accountable and to hold the university accountable to make sure that that diversity is representative. So yeah, if you, if you want Royal Holloway to actually be the community that it claims to be, please vote for me on the 22nd to the 24th of March.

Kate Roberts 10:41

Thanks very much, Alice. We will now move on to our next candidate, which is Alice Goode.

Alice Goode 10:49

Hi, everyone. I'm Alice Goode, she/her, a third year liberal arts and politics student, and I want to be your VP Wellbeing and Diversity. So throughout my time at uni, I co-founded the liberal arts society in my first year holding the position of social sec, and managing to finish our first year by organising and throwing the ball for all members and friends. And in my second year, I was elected as VP of the society in my third and second year, and I volunteered as a peer guide, as well, while working part time on campus. So I've always been really active at uni and got involved with just everything I could possibly be. And I was selected to take part in the micro placement scheme in my second year. And I've also received diversity and inclusion training, and I'm a conscious contributing writer to the orbital on issues such as wellbeing and diversity.

11:39

[Phone rings]

Alice Goode 11:41

I want to go into career working in diversity inclusion. So I'm really passionate about this position. It's like pretty much my dream job. So I've done a lot of work outside of uni to gain as much experience in this field as possible. And I've observed several diversity and inclusion training events ran by the

military, with an emphasis on allyship and support, attended diversity inclusion events, notably one held by one of our uni's partners, bright network, which was earlier today. And I volunteer as a contributing editor at a startup magazine called Able Zine, which is created by and for disabled and neurodivergent people.

Alice Goode 12:16

And so the basis of my campaign is that I want your voices to be heard. And I will use this position as a way to create a space for minority voices and to get your wants and needs supported. So my four main aims are as follows and they reflect and expand on current SU, University and University policy. So my first is to really amplify minority voices. So I only have the lived experience of a disabled white woman. And I recognise that so I want to work with all the different collectives in society as an individual students to create this space for your own voices to be heard.

Alice Goode 12:52

I also want to centralise the student services in a hub. So I have first hand experience of how the different services like DDS, Wellbeing and Extensions, they don't communicate with each other, and our needs aren't met in the most effective way. So I will centralise these services just so that support can be accessed by telling your story once not having to completely be referred again and again. And I will want to expand these services as well for international and mature students who may have extenuating, extenuating circumstances like language barriers or caring duties that aren't given the right support currently.

Alice Goode 13:27

Mental health is also a big focus of mine. And so students with mental health issues are statistically more likely to drop out of uni. And I want to change this. So I will lobby the university from our extensive and proactive mental health support university wide.

Alice Goode 13:41

And finally, I would like to introduce a Wellness Wednesday. So I want to make wellness a top priority 2020/2021 as a year has been a rough, and so I want to guarantee that the uni is catering to your well being as much as it possibly can. So aim to work with insanity radio, do meditation sessions and yoga droppings to provide a calm and quiet paced place on campus. And we hopefully transmit, transition back on to on campus learning. So you want to check out my campaign, please go to GoodeToInclude on Instagram. And I'll leave you with my final aim. I don't want to stand for you. I want to stand with you.

Kate Roberts 14:21

Thank you very much, Alice. Thank you both for your opening statements. We're now going to move on to questions where you will have five to answer. So you'll have two minutes to answer each question. Your first question is, what more does Royal Holloway need to do for mental health? This time we're going to start with Alice Goode.

Alice Goode 14:41

Hello. So I think Firstly, it just needs to be shouted about way more and way more visible. I was too scared to go in last year didn't know who the counsellors were where they were. And I think we need to

completely overhaul how we talk about mental health on uni, especially making it more inclusive for men. So really changing the narrative around that. And as I said, I want to centralise the hub so that you go to one spot. And so if you're having an issue, you can go to one place and find all the information you need without being, not sure where to look online, not sure who to contact, not sure which member of staff you need to go to, which part the university their halls, their residences are. So I think centralise it and shout about it, and just make sure that people know every time where they need to go, I think that's really key.

Kate Roberts 15:34

Thank you so much, Alice, we're now going to move on to our next candidate, Alice Finnegan.

Alice Finnegan 15:42

Um, so yeah, I think there are a lot of elements of Royal Holloway's welfare system that is good, but I think a lot of them can be improved. For example, in my manifesto, I wanted to start something that I think will be really helpful, which is a mental health kind of like outreach programme. So I know that the university do currently have systems and systems in place. So if you're feeling like stressed or anxious or depressed, you can call someone up. But the advertising for those just isn't there. Like I didn't know about them until this year, and I'm in my third year. So I would just increase advertising for that. And just make sure that those systems are built on and added to so that as many people can access them as possible, because those are key.

Alice Finnegan 16:27

I also want to have a look at the welfare system and just see what's going well, and what's not working and just redistribute where needed. Just try and make it the best it can be. And one of the main aims of my campaign is to bridge the gap between academia and welfare. So I think that a lot of the time, we're stressed because of the academic pressures that we face every day, especially at the moment with COVID. It's just a mess. So I think starting with academia, will be really important just to, to negate the need for welfare later on. So if you, it's like more of a preventative thing, like it's a proactive thing. So you can stop any, fallout from like academic stresses as it were. So yeah, providing that welfare at like an academic level, first having academic centred meetings where you can go and talk to people when you're worried or stressed, just so that you don't necessarily let it build up and then have like an episode or like something like that later on, which I know, I have personal experience. So I don't want anyone else to go through that. So yeah, just making sure that like academia and welfare on the same, on the same playing field, and they're communicating with each other, because at the moment, they're just treated as two different entities. And I think that's something that Royal Holloway could fix really easily. And would just, you know, make it a lot better, because it would have dedicated space where students can go and talk about the things that they're worried about.

Kate Roberts 18:03

Thank you, Alice. Thank you both for your answers. We're now going to move on to your second question. No one individual can represent all identities of all students. So what would you do to bridge this gap? This time we're going to start with Alice Finnegan.

Alice Finnegan 18:20

Okay, yeah. So obviously, I recognise that I am of privilege. I'm just a white woman. So I don't have, I can't represent everybody, obviously. But I'm not necessarily trying to, I think my job is to facilitate representation of people by getting other representatives in. So I worded that really badly, I'm sorry.

Alice Finnegan 18:47

Basically, I'm going to get student reps, at the moment they are only forced if it's academic. Whereas for BAME Collectives, LGBTQ+ and the Disabled Collective, they're not enforced, which is just ridiculous. So I would make sure that those positions were filled in order that every collective has a representative that they can identify with, and they can talk to, and they feel like they can actually be heard and that their issues will be raised. And then making Yeah, so just making sure that representation is there for everybody, so that they have a place to go to and that every community is representative. And everyone feels like they're actually being heard. And I don't want it to be like tokenistic. At the moment, I think it is a little bit. And I think that representation should really be embedded in the culture of Royal Holloway, like it doesn't make sense to me that we have such a diverse community. And we're just not showing that at the moment.

Alice Finnegan 19:50

And I also want to diversify the curriculum, which I think will encourage a lot of people to just be educated about like different kinds of cultures and collectives and like experiences that they can't themselves live. So I think at the moment, our curriculum is very whitewashed, I do philosophy and I'm reading about a bunch of 1700s guys who are dead and definitely white. So it would be nice to just have a little bit of diversity within the curriculum so that students can see themselves reflected. And we have the community reflected within everything we do at the university.

Kate Roberts 20:27

Thanks, Alice, we're now going to move on to our next candidate, Alice Goode.

Alice Goode 20:32

Hi, yes. So as I said, in my opening statement, I am a white to disabled woman. And so whilst that does put me in two of the collectives, there are many, many more that I do not represent. And that you know, is including going beyond the obvious BAME, LGBTQ, also commuting students, it's mature students. So it goes way beyond what I think most people really think as minority groups on campus, our, you know, our mature students are the least represented on campus. So I think part of what I want to do is not forget anybody, and just recognise that I can't speak for you, I don't want to assume anything on your behalf. What I will do, and I think is crucial for positions like this is, yes, I am privileged, and I'm running for a place that has a voice. So if I were to be elected in, I would want to use that power, to create spaces for these people to to speak, or not only a space, but a safe space, where people feel comfortable. Because we have seen I mean, this is my third year now I've seen such powerful voices, passionate students, we've, we're saying what we want to say it's all over social media, it's all over Overheard, and conversations that we're having, there isn't a lack of it, you know, it's just not being supported as much. And so that's what I want to do. As part of the Disabled Collective. I, you know, it's such a community. And it's been great for me having that in the last two years of uni. And so I want to continually meet with the Collectives and the societies and the students, on one to one, and really ask, what do you want to see from me? And what do you want to be put in place, so that they're that so that

there isn't a gap, what is being put through, what is being sort of like processed at the top level is actually really coming from students. And, you know, as, as Alice, again, said, our campus is really diverse. And I will guarantee to continue to meet with everybody and really get your voices heard.

Kate Roberts 22:40

Thanks, Alice. And thank you both so much for your answers on that question. We're now going to move on to your third question, which is, what is your number one priority for wellbeing and diversity for the next academic year? This time, we're going to start with Alice Goode.

Alice Finnegan 22:55

Yes. So I think it's been quite clear that my one thing really running through is getting your voice heard and actually talking to you. Because I don't, you know, I could go off on this very much and have my five key aims. And this is what I want to do, and not actually consult any students in the process. But that's not what I want to do. I feel like this is a role that needs massive engagement with the student body to be in any way effective. So my one priority is to continue this relationship with, you know, we've seen the Collectives come into existence in the past year, really. And we've also seen the introduction of the Be Heard initiative at uni. And so that is a way for people to report microaggressions, sexual harassment, anything that they do not feel comfortable with on campus, that maybe don't feel safe reporting or don't know who to report to. And that's a way to stay to stay safe, and to stay anonymous if you want to.

Alice Finnegan 23:53

So the university has already got a lot of these systems in place. And I want to bring that forward and sort of bring the mental health bit forward as well. So we have counsellors we have you know, wellbeing system, we have a, you know, process in place. Let's bring that forward. Let's enhance what we already have. Let's make it more accessible and more long term.

Alice Finnegan 24:16

So I think what I really want to do, my main aim is bring what we already have the voices we've already seen on social media and in our groups. Let's bring the structures we already have and the services we already have. And let's make them work for us. I don't want to overhaul and I don't want to renew. I want to bring it together and bring it forward because I recognise there's an amazing work done by other VP Wellbeing and Diversity students, by members of staff who this is their full time job. And I just want to build on that and work on that bench. Get What You Want to see in place. And I think I think that's really important. Yeah.

Kate Roberts 24:58

Thanks Alice. When I Let's move on to our next candidate, Alice Finnegan.

Alice Finnegan 25:06

Yeah, so I think my priority in the next upcoming year, and probably the heart of my campaign, is that I really want to change the culture of the university from being business led to a student led. So at the moment, it's very much running in a business model. And I think that it prioritises monetary gain and getting new students in, and it doesn't really focus on the students that are actually at the university, or

listen to those voices. So I think just really getting student input and hearing what they have to say and not ignoring it. And not focusing on trying to get the new cohort in is really important. Because I know that a lot of people, when they join Royal Holloway, they expect one thing that they've been sold, and they don't necessarily get that experience. Now I just don't think that's fair, especially as the uni could not run without students.

Alice Finnegan 26:01

So yeah, I really want to push that students at the core of everything that I do, and that the university do. Um, yeah. So the main way that I think I would do that is through student representatives, because again, like, you can't have University without students, and the student representatives are the best way to get the voice of the students across. And I would just make sure that these representatives are like, diverse and represent the whole community, just so that we have every single voice being put forth to the uni so that they can hear everything that we're saying. And they're just asking about our experiences, and not just taking them for granted or not listening to them actually doing something about them. You know, the university, they have a 10 year plan to include increasing diversity, which is not just in terms of like race and ethnicity, but it's also in terms of class and social structures like that, like I come from a very low income background. And I think that's part of their plan in the next 10 years. But we need to make sure that they actually do this and

Kate Roberts 27:19

I'm sorry to interrupt you Alice but you have not run out of time now. Thank you very much for your answer. We're now going to move on to the fourth question, which is, how would you support students to safely enjoy social life on campus? For this question, we're going to start with Alice Finnegan.

Alice Finnegan 27:40

Okay, so yeah, this is a massive issue at the moment, like with everything that's going on, I've seen it all over social media. It's just, it's been, I got so angry about it. Um, so obviously, at the moment, I think the, the aim is on keeping women safe. So we need to reassess the training of security staff members. I do work at the SU, I have seen students get security and just not get anything done. Like they tell them they've been harassed, security, just kind of like, you're drunk go away. So we need to reassess that training because that can't happen. Like it still is reported, but it's not dealt with.

Alice Finnegan 28:23

So I know a lot of people if they do report it, they then find the reporting system very difficult to go through sometimes it's more difficult to go through than like the actual harassment itself, which is insane. So we need to like do a full mass analysis of what goes wrong there and how to fix it. And possibly, like implement St Johns ambulance more at the moment they care for all the drunk people that fall over but they could really help with that kind of thing. Um, just to make sure that we have those systems in place for SU nights, I think Henn said like something about colour changing straws to react if the drugs been put in your drink. That's an amazing idea. Definitely implement that. Literally lids on cups also stops your drink getting poured over you when someone elbows you, which happens all the time. I miss the SU. So yeah, just making sure that booklets are handed out and freshers events telling you, Hey, this is what spiking feels like this is what it looks like. Make sure you look after your friends make sure they're okay. Increased the use of signs and toilets like have you been spiked? This is what

it looks like. just hand them out to keep them safe. Help them there have a booklet that you can literally read, um, have it posted all over social media. And also in terms of men like we need to increase their reporting and make sure people safe.

Kate Roberts 29:51

Thanks, Alice. And we're now going to move on to our next candidate Alice Goode.

Alice Goode 29:55

Yes, this is a great question and one that I think needs to be tackled. With a really broad mindset, so it's really easy to just think of one or two social groups to tackle this with, but I want to be as broad and inclusive as possible. So I think a way to do this is to make all events as accessible and as inclusive as possible. So for example, from the very start of the freshers fair, that is extremely overwhelming, anxiety ridden plays and isn't accessible for people who may use wheelchairs or mobility aids or hearing devices. So right from the very getgo, I would be wanting to just make it more accessible and more of a safe space.

Alice Goode 30:39

So I would kind of do this by helping the societies and having sit down sessions with that social media campaigners and their presidents and making sure that they are welcoming in that branding in how they approach students and how they talk to them, that they are writing image descriptions, and using closed captions, and all their social media, and doing unconscious bias training potentially, with the with the societies and the groups as well. And I want to back that up with training to all staff members working at the SU or as professors or in the shop for around like gender pronouns, appropriate language, to use person first language and just kind of really getting them back to grips. I know they've done that some more, but you know, we've moved again from that and, and sort of like gender identity, retrain all of that.

Alice Goode 31:31

And I think, when you see people like you, it becomes a lot more inclusive, and you feel safer. So really supporting societies like the African and the Caribbean society, the LGBTQ+ society, and encourage them to do that SU takeovers really raised their voices and highlight what they're doing on campus already. Because, you know, when you know, people in those things, you know, that they're actually doing so much already. And they've got active communities and active voices. And I think bringing that forward and just making people see if they see themselves, you know, championed and supported. That That, to me is what will make it more safe for people to enjoy.

Kate Roberts 32:11

Thanks, Alice. And thank you both so much for your answers. We're now going to move on to your fifth and final question. This year, there have been a number of high profile incidents that have happened on campus. What should harassment reporting processes and support look like? We're going to start this time with Alice Goode.

Alice Goode 32:29

Yes, um, this is a really important question. And I didn't want to preface it with, um, I was very engaged with that. And there were some very powerful, very engaged voices already. And they were all over social media. And they were raising awareness, creating petitions, doing, you know, sending emails to the professors and to Paul Layzell, they, you know, there were great strategies in place, and it just shows how resilient and how passionate our students already are. And I want to harness that and bring that in as an official part of an SU policy. So really paying attention to the student voices. And so when something like that happens, I would engage with that and bring it all forward to the attention of the university, and make harassment reporting processes really transparent. And just a very, you know, no messing around very straight down the line system, where there's no room for kind of I know a lot this time, just, you know, take, making people accountable, and being as transparent as possible. So the students know what's going on, know who has looked at this and who is making something happen about this, because a lot of it, you report it and hear nothing for weeks, I think that's not good enough. So I want people to be held accountable to the students. And so let them know what's going on what's happening, what the process is, and what they promise, because the students are already doing the work. And I just want to match that into kind of the policy and the processes that are going on at university and really create that safe environment where if you report something, I will guarantee that the SU will at least hear of it, see it, and then should tell you what is happening as a result of that. So I think the key things that, transparency, accountancy like holding you accountable and just kind of listening to you.

Kate Roberts 34:29

Thanks, Alice, thank you for that. We're going to now move on to our next candidate Alice Finnegan

Alice Finnegan 34:38

Ugh my hair has like, gotta mind of its own today. Um, so yeah, I pretty actually really agree with what Alice Goode said there. It's just all about accountability. It's, it will be my job as the VP of Welfare and Diversity to just hold everyone accountable. Like it's not just my job to do welfare and diversity. It's the VP of Education. Is the President and it's the VP of Socs and Sports. And it's also the university's, like, they all need to have that as the focus, they all need to be held accountable, if they're not including a certain Collective, or if they're lacking in certain areas, like, we need to hold them accountable for that.

Alice Finnegan 35:21

And just make sure that student voices as loud as they possibly can be, like, again, getting student representatives, who students feel like they can identify with and actually talk to and be heard, making sure that those issues get directly. What's the word? Sorry, um, get directly like communicated to people who are going to listen, and are going to make a change based on what those students have said. So, you know, they usually don't necessarily keep us updated all that often. Or a lot of the times we get emails that are like, we're gonna let you know what's happening in four days. And I think that is kind of good, because, you know, it makes us know that something is going to happen. But it's also very frustrating for students to get an email thinking that it's going to be about one thing, and then actually being like, oh, we're not going to get that information for another two weeks, or they're just emailing us to let us know that they actually have no idea what's going on with this. Um, students need to go know what's going on, like, Is this our university, we need to feel safe and supported and have like a safe space to go to and to discuss those issues. You know, reporting issues needs to be, we

need a better reporting system. I don't think it works. At the moment. I think a lot of the time, reports are brushed off or they're excused or they're not dealt with properly. So we just need to really analyse where that's going wrong.

Kate Roberts 36:51

Thanks, Alice. And thank you both so much for answering all the questions this evening. That is the end of this segment of candidate question time.

Kate Roberts 36:59

So voting is open for Monday the 22nd of March until Wednesday the 24th of March, the results being announced later that evening.

Kate Roberts 37:07

In our voting system, we have single transferable vote, which is also known as STV. This means that you can rank candidates in order of your preference. Candidates will need to secure 50%, plus one, of the total votes in order to secure the position. If this is not achieved right away, the person with the lowest votes will be removed from the election, and their votes will transfer to the remaining candidates, according to your preferences. This will continue to happen until either a candidate achieves the 50% plus one line, or any one candidate remains.

Kate Roberts 37:37

Thank you so much to our candidates. And thank you to you for joining us this evening. We're going to return tomorrow at the same time while we'll hear from candidates for the Vice President Education role. So I look forward to seeing you there. Thank you very much. I hope you have a lovely evening.

Alice Goode 37:51

Thank you. Bye