

## **Hustings Questions – VPX**

Answers by Mia Cook

### **You've all been on the HUS before, what do you think your biggest accomplishment on the HUS has been?**

This year on the HUS has been extremely different from the role I expected to be taking on. I am proud of running college events for the 4 week shadowing scheme, which was held virtually for the first time, and I am so happy that the shadows presented my event with the liberation officers with an award on the last day of the scheme. I also formed a working group with access officers from other colleges to analyse admissions statistics and consider where colleges and the university are falling short of access targets.

However, I would say that my biggest accomplishment this year has been challenging issues in college. Before the start of the academic year I spoke to staff about removing rent for quarantining students, removing fines, providing greater information about Covid restrictions and the issue of security in college. I raised the motion of signing the SU accessibility pledge in HUS meetings and instigated conversations surrounding harassment. I worked along side Maxx, our gender equalities officer to request greater reassurance and action from college and pushed staff to release the statement ensuring no student would face consequences for breaking Covid restrictions in the instance of making a report. I have met with senior members of staff to discuss these issues and pushed for both increased open meetings and student working groups. I understand that not all of these things may appear to have been successful from the outside, but I started my role as access officer expecting to speak to school kids and tell them how great Homerton is: when I saw issues arise in college I was proactive and fought my case in both HUS meetings and with college staff. I hope that as VPX I can take this further and continue to fight for these things with greater confidence and knowledge of how both the HUS and wider student politics works in Cambridge.

### **How do you think you will be able to support the rest of the HUS team effectively?**

As a HUS member this year, the thing that has stifled our ability to take action, come together to make decisions and fight in the corner of students effectively

has been a lack of communication. Because I have seen this first-hand I will be going into this role prepared to ensure that next years' committee is cohesive and that we communicate well, in order to take action as a student union.

I also like to think that I am a friendly and approachable person – I'm always around for a chat over a cup of tea and my absolute favourite pastime is procrastinating from uni work so any opportunity to help other HUS members with what they are doing, I will be there! I understand what is expected of other roles on the HUS, after working closely with them this year so I will look forward to supporting the team fulfilling their roles! For the members of the HUS team I am assigned to support, I will hold regular catch up meetings to talk about what's going on and make sure they are balancing HUS work and other life stuff well.

**Would you consider continuing the push to leave CamSU which was the trajectory we were on before the pandemic?**

I will make my decisions as VPX based on the opinions and feedback I get from the wider student body to represent you as best as I can – so if Homerton students wish to leave CamSU, I will support that decision. However, to share where I currently stand, I believe in transforming and improving something we are part of rather than abandoning ship and there are many benefits of being a part of CamSU.

Previous HUS committees considered disaffiliating with CUSU (previous name and structure of CamSU), due to high affiliation fees. This idea was subsequently dopped because affiliation fees were removed – the cost to join the SU now comes from college budget rather than JCR budget meaning there really isn't a financial loss of being affiliated. It is also important to stress that the HUS are not controlled by CamSU: We have our own constitution (which you can read on the JCR website) and we can make decisions in college that go against CamSU if we wish. Being affiliated allows us to receive guidance and support when we need it and have closer connection to other colleges to ensure we can fight for what is best for us and not miss out – this year on the HUS I've learnt that having concrete examples of what is happening at other colleges really helps when we are speaking to college staff.

Being affiliated with CamSU means we are provided with free sexual health resources (what are the HUS for, if not embarrassing you in front of your parents on move in day by filling your welcome pack with condoms?) The SU also provides training courses for our HUS team which helps prepare them for running welfare sessions. I completely agree with the concerns that these training sessions are not comprehensive enough, but I see greater benefit in improving the resources and support that CamSU provides rather than leaving and relying on college direction

and funding alone for things like sexual health resources, welfare training, accessibility guidance and consent and harassment workshops.

This year as Access officer I have found the support of the SU invaluable and I see the great work they do to support access and outreach as well as coordinate liberation campaigns. This is not to say that CamSU is in any way perfect or representative of all students, just that I believe there is some good there to work with and as VPX I would channel my time and energy into representing Homerton and improving the structure rather than leaving.

**How do you intend to vote in CamSU to ensure you represent Homerton? And what would you vote if your personal opinion contradicts that of the general student body?**

Before motions are voted upon in SU council I plan to always consult Homerton students through social media polls and having an open inbox for anyone to share their thoughts with me. I believe that with easy, low effort ways to give opinions on motions and regular communication we can increase student participation and therefore get a clearer idea of what Homerton students as a whole want. I will post weekly updates from the SU council on the JCR page and in the HUS bulletin so students can easily stay informed and respond with their opinions. I will also work closely with the rest of the HUS committee, and in particular the liberation officers to ensure how I vote represents all students as far as possible. However, I understand that previous VPX officers have found that they often receive little feedback from students so representing the true opinions of the student body does rely on those who reach out. If I receive feedback and input from Homerton students that contradicts with my own view, I will still vote with the student majority I have heard from. I strongly believe that our job on the HUS is to represent students rather than to build a platform for ourselves.

**Do you believe that CamSU in its current form represents the student body well? How would you ensure that it continues to do so/improves?**

I do see many strengths in CamSU as it stands; they provide free resources and training workshops for JCR committees; they give guidance for challenging college decisions and ensure we stay connected with other colleges to compare campaign approaches and outcomes. I personally have found several of the liberation campaigns run by the SU extremely helpful and supportive during my time at Cambridge so far and I believe that many other students have had similar positive experiences. So, there is lots of good stuff to work with and hold onto at CamSU!

However, I know that Homerton students have felt particularly unrepresented and dissatisfied with the SU in the past: feeling disheartened by council outcomes where Homerton has consistently been alone in voting against the majority, with their

management of UCU strike action last year, amongst other things. I believe that the best way to improve this is to show up. As VPX I will attend every SU council meeting and speak out when Homerton students disagree with motions, I will suggest amendments to proposals and be willing to make a fuss!

By creating easy to digest explanations of the SU structure, inviting SU members to speak to Homerton students about campaigns and providing low commitment ways to share opinions on campaigns and motions, I hope we will be able to have greater participation at Homerton and therefore improve representation of students. Will voting for me lead to numerous Facebook posts pestering you to vote in the SU elections next year? Absolutely. But I hope that by then we will have increased engagement with uni wide campaigns at Homerton and formed a clear student voice, so voting in an election will be no big deal! (If you can't tell by now I am an optimist and despite its flaws I really think there's opportunity to make the SU better for us!)

### **What are the most important changes you want to see at a uni-wide level to improve student experience?**

Although the motion for a new term structure and reading week passed just yesterday at the SU council, there will continue to be a lot of work needed to convince university staff and have this implemented. I want to see recognition of student concerns about this new structure, and greater strides to improve student wellbeing provision at university.

I'm sure everyone would agree that conversations about student mental health and wellbeing have increased over the last year, and yet structural change seems to lag behind. I want to see an increase in mental health provision at the university including shortened waiting lists for counselling. I believe that both central university provision and college services are in dire need of improvement, and this is something that could be achieved with pressure coming from all directions. In particular, I see the need for an increased number of counselling appointments available, reduced waiting times and increased funding available for students who need support accessing private treatment. Another change of personal importance to me is to chase up the motion to have content notes on reading lists which passed over a year ago. Whilst this motion passed and the SU have been in conversation with departments, I feel this has taken too long and that greater pressure should be put on departments to see a material outcome as soon as possible.

Also vital for improving the environment of our university is to challenge and overhaul the way in which the university currently deals with reports of harassment and assault. This is an issue that Homerton students are far too aware of, so I believe that this change needs to occur both within college and on a uni wide scale. A motion to support 'campaigning against gendered based violence'

was raised at the SU Council yesterday (15/03/21), raising the concern that differentiated policies and procedures across the university fail students in need. I want to see greater college collaboration to demand consistent and transparent reporting and discipline procedures that will support survivors and ensure students have all the information they need to access support. This is just one example where differences between colleges and central university procedures can harm students. I would like to see comprehensive consent training for all year groups, not just in fresher's week, as well as training for staff on how to respond and appropriately deal with disclosures of harm. These are just some of the changes I would hope to see at a uni wide level over the next year.