

AGM Report for Vice President Welfare

Name: Amy Merchant

Role: Vice President Welfare

Progress on Manifesto Pledges:

Large parts of my manifesto were centred around in-person campaigning and events, which is something that I have had to adapt due to Covid-19.

LGBTQ+ Libguide: *One section of my manifesto was focussed on hosting liberation events in order to get students speaking about their experiences using the arts. As these events were no longer physically possible, I adapted this idea and turned it into the creation of liberation libguides. A libguide is a virtual space accessible through the digital library services for students. They are typically academic guides however, I created the first ever LGBTQ+ libguide that was launched in time for LGBTQ+ History Month. This libguide is a space for LGBTQ+ students and allies to keep up to date with artistic content recommended by other students within the community. This digital space contains everything from book and film recommendations, to musical playlists curated by the LGBTQ+ forum. I wanted this project to recreate the space that I originally had in mind, so that forums could have a space to see themselves represented in the arts. The LGBTQ+ Liberation and Campaigns Officer (LCO) has been made an admin of the page so that the forum can input content as they like.*

It was a slow process as myself and the LGBTQ+ LCO had to input the content ourselves, but it was a success and was launched during the month. The long-term plan is to make sure that each LCO has one of these digital guides, meaning that every forum will be able to have their own space to share the content that they love.

Student Guides: *A second section of my manifesto was to create some virtual video guides that would mainly support first year students that were transitioning from home to university. I envisioned that these guides would cover subjects such as the house-hunting process, as well as more general questions that students ask when moving to university. Covid-19 did prevent me from being able to run this project as I was working from home and therefore had limited access to campus and the right equipment. Although I wasn't able to fulfil this manifesto pledge, I have covered some of the initial ideas I had within other aspects of my work, such as the student renter toolkit. I am also currently working with the welfare policy co-ordinator and the university on a website update, where students will be able to search their questions within an internal system to get the right signposted Lancaster specific support. This project will cover the key questions I wanted to answer in my manifesto pledge, and will cover everything from academic support to student health.*

Housing: *This year I launched my campaign 'Stop Housing Haste', which included the decision to delay the releasing of contracts to students from SU Living. This gave students extra time to make those large housing decisions without pressure, which was extremely important during these turbulent times.*

One part of my campaign that I particularly enjoyed was developing my own student renter toolkit, which is available on the SU website. I worked alongside the Advice Service and comms team to gather useful information, tools, and student renter tips to help prepare other students for their house hunting experience in Lancaster. This is now permanently accessible to students online.

Other Projects I Have Been Working On:

Inclusive contraception and period products: As the Students' Union building has been closed for this academic year to students, I realised that there was no other centralised and dedicated space for students to access inclusive contraception and period products. Alongside the SU Advice service and the university library, I organised for a space to be placed in the library so that students could access the products that they needed. After consultation with students, it became clear that this was a highly desired initiative that was benefitting students during some of their toughest times. The initiative started at the beginning of March, and so far, we have distributed approximately 700 condoms, 230 period products, as well as a range of other inclusive contraceptives.

After participating as a panel member on the Women+ Forum event 'Changing Perceptions: Menstrual Health Roundtable', I realised just how important it is that students have access to period products on their university campus. I have since started a student collection of these products, which will then be distributed through the library to other students who might need them.

Care packages: In first term, many students flagged to me that it wasn't just food products that they were struggling to obtain, but also necessary hygiene and care products. The Advice service, Central staff, and I set up the 'care necessities' bags, which were free bags full of these aforementioned products. These bags were available through collection and delivery, and although the perceived demand was high, this wasn't reflected by the amount we gave away. If I were to run this project again, I would potentially push harder through social media to ensure students had heard the message. Another reason the uptake was so low potentially may be because we had to rely on online channels to get the message across.

Priorities for the remainder of the year:

Mental Health: The remainder of my year will be to ensure that the university gets its 'extension of mental health service hours' proposal over the line. I will be spending my time supporting the university on this proposal to make sure that it is implemented effectively, and that my student officer perspective is both heard and considered. I will also be assisting the university on a large website update to ensure students are being signposted to the best support possible, whether their query is academic or something else.

Other priorities: I have also recently volunteered to sit on the Engagement Advisory Group which I am looking forward to.

Alongside the union's welfare policy co-ordinator, I will also be focussing my attention on housing policy development. We will be developing this housing policy together to ensure that housing aligns with the ethos of the union.

Officer Budget Expenditure:

I've had no expenditure from my officer budget so far this year.