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Students’ Representative Council

Minutes

16th May 2023 Ustinov, Bonar Hall

Attendance

Audrey Oko (BME), Andre Costas (Environment and Sustainability), Victoria Simpson (Mature), Eamonn Custance (General), Mavis Whytock (Disabilities) Parissa Robinson (SRC Chairperson), Aaron Fernandez (Employability) .

School Presidents

Liam Brown (Business), Dominic Lee (Medicine/ SRC Vice-Chairperson), Ayush Laddha (Dentistry), Clara Seyfried (SHSL), Simone Bairstow (Health Sciences), Auysh Laddha (Dentistry).

Executive

Nyasha (Ash) Mutembwa (President), Obiozor Okoro (Vice President of Representation), Jazmine Bennett (Vice President of Community)

Guests/Observers

Ian Bueger (newly elected IMC 23-24), Alex Roberts (Student Voice Support Officer), Lucas Fonseca (Co-option Health Sciences SP), Matthew (incoming Dentistry SP), Nicole Okoro (incoming VPR), Carlo Morelli (DUCU co-president), Melissa D’ascenzio (DUCU co-president).

Apologies

Bhuvana Sai Rheddy Komaragunta (Equality, Diversity and Welfare), Aishwarya Jayakumar (Women’s), Ligin Mathew (Taught Postgraduate), Amarachi Ejim (Vice President of Student Wellbeing), Zining Li (Vice President of Student Activities), Hasan Mahmood (Vice President of Fundraising).

## Minute-taker

Loukia Morari (Policy and Research Officer).

**1.Chairs Welcome**

1.1 Vice-Chair Dominic welcomed the council and invited Parissa to say a few words.

1.2 Parissa informed the SRC that she would not be chairing the meeting as she is presenting two motions later in the meeting. She thanked the council for their continued efforts and gave special praise to Victoria on the ‘sip and swim’ event, Liam and Alex for his social media work.

**2. Minutes of last meeting (s)**

2.1 21st of March minutes:

-Proposer: Eamonn

-Seconder: Liam

2.2 18th of April minutes:

-Proposer: Ayush

-Seconder: Simone

**3. Action Tracker**

-Proposer: Eamonn

-Seconder: Liam

**Discussion:**

**4. UCU representatives – Marking Boycott, key extracts**

4.1 Carlo gave insight into the dispute: *‘There's been a series of disputes across all the universities over the past number of years related to pay, pension and working conditions. Workloads, casualisations and pay discrimination exists across the sector. Dundee is no different to any of this. It's culminated now with what we call a marking and assessment boycott from the middle 20th of April, which means that academic staff who are involved in marking final assessments, exams and final assessments in terms of coursework may be refusing to do that as part of the demands from the university sector to get its act together on the questions of the pay and pay discrimination, aspects of the dispute.’*

4.2 Carlo gave insight into the background at a local level: *‘ Dundee has a gender pay gap of 16% - If you look at things like hourly paid lectures, particularly for black men and minority staff, it's much worse at an estimate of 30%’ This looks like massive disparity between the pay that someone like myself as a white male, and someone who's a more junior staff member or woman or black member of staff, even on the same grades.’*

4.3 Carlo gave a note on Internationalisation: *‘Universities are pulling in huge numbers of international students, both their finances across the sector as a whole. We're talking about 2 billion pounds of surplus, which is being siphoned off to buildings, to high salaries to top managers and not going into student welfare, not to staff welfare, and not going into provision of education. So, all of us wherever we are in the university, whether you're a student or a staff member, are finding that conditions of learning education and the conditions of work being squeezed at the expense of the benefits of the university to generate surpluses.’*

4.4 Carlo gave a note on Housing: *‘Housing crisis students are facing that's impacting their experience. I've got students who are living in Aberdeen, students who are living in Perth, all over Scotland, and cannot get to Dundee except by paying large amounts of transport and travel costs. So, the consequence of this is that students are being having their education suffer because of the way in which the structural inequalities exist in this and other universities.’*

4.5 Carlo shared his experience: *‘My example, I teach on a masters course, level five course, in the School of Business, that two years ago jumped up to 125 students, last year had 350 this year has 460. I don't think I've met more than two or three of those students in the whole semester. Because everything is online. Everything is so large, there isn't capacity in the University to hold classes for the students and the consequence of that is that education is being diminished. That's the reality of it.’ What happens to the assessments that have not been marked? 'We don't know what the university is going to do about those assessments that haven't been marked. In other parts of the sector, where we've heard about this, universities and talk about ignoring final marks, trying to graduate students without full credits, just using no detriment policies. As they used during COVID to ignore parts of courses they've done and then we've got marks for and trying to graduate students with degrees that they may or may not deserve. And that again, is the heart the fact that universities considered degrees as just simply a commodity. Once you've paid your fees, once you've done all the work, that's it, they want to wash their hands of it all.’*

4.6 Melissa conducted a QA: Do academic staff have to declare that they are taking part in the MAB? *‘So, the official advice [from UCU] would be do not, do not engage. There's been emails that have gone out to staff and obviously we have written to HR and to the principal about this, not to solicit members to disclose whether they're taking action before they actually engage in the action. So afterwards, if they are confronted about a piece of work that they haven't done, then they will respond truthfully, and they will disclose that they haven't marked that piece of assessment because they have taken part in the marking and assessment.’*

4.6.1 Parissa asked the following: A criticism that comes up frequently is that it's unfair to students to strike because they're missing out on quality teaching time and assessment feedback. What would your response be to that? *‘It comes back to what Carlo said, right? That education is seen as a commodity. And so the only way to actually get a senior management sometimes to listen is to disrupt the activity that obviously, they in a way see as the most disruptive and unfortunately, this often is teaching but I would also say that sometimes it is also the resolution of management not to listen to the union or not to engage with the unions that prolongs the strike action and is actually more damaging to students. We can see an example just now. We have written to the principal to talk about possible resolutions and especially to challenge the fact that just now our members are being threatened with 100% deductions for something that is possibly less than 10% of their workload. So, losing their entire pay for to engage in action, short of a strike (ASOS). In other universities, this threat has been reversed by talking to the unions and and union representatives and coming to an agreement that as soon as the marking and assessment boycott ends, then the marking the marks and the feedback will be returned to the student. Now that would be in the interest of the students not threatening 100% reduction and sitting on that thread without engaging with the union. So, if we're really talking about what is in the interest of the students, we are currently engaged in the marking boycott and remember that what we've been imposed a pay offer for next year. That is a 15% pay cut, which means that next year, we're going to work for free for 55 days. That is a lot, so our members are angry at this point. I think we never had to get to the point of marking and assessment boycott. If we are talking about fairness to students, the senior management team knew and universities VCs and principals knew that this was going to happen, and they have not engaged with us since January when the members in our union have rejected the pay offer. The university and college Employers Association has refused to sit down and talk to us, from January until May. If they really cared about what was going to happen in May, they would have talked to us and they would talk to us now if they really cared about students experience and returning great marks and appropriate feedback to students.’*

4.6.2 Clara asked the following: What has the university's response been in terms of communications in negotiations with you in terms of the marking and assessment boycott? *‘So, we wrote to the principal, I think on the 28th of April, and we only heard back two or three days ago, something like that. So, that has been quite long. The email that we got back said let's find a date when we can meet and since that has been radio silence. So, we said happy to meet and try to resolve the situation as quickly as possible. There's been some lack of engagement with the senior management team throughout the whole strike process. It's been difficult, but they do have a voice and national level because they do sit on those committees and they could come out and say, we support staff and then that in return of that kind of statement, and that kind of support. We would, of course offer a gesture of goodwill from our side.’*

4.6.3 Melissa made a closing statement: *‘It's the most disappointing for us because I can assure you that none of our members want a marking and assessment boycott. We see our students; we follow them throughout their career. We want to see them succeed, we want to see them graduate we want them to go on to better things, bigger things. We don't want to withdraw marks or feedback from our students. So, it's really painful on our side, don't think that we're doing this, you know, with a light heart is really hard. We have daily meetings literally to support staff who have you know, the difficulty of getting through and sticking to a marking an assessment boycott. It's really hard on staff as well.’*

4.7 Dominic thanked the representatives for their insights.

**5. Co-option Health Sciences SP**

5.1 Dominic welcomed Lucas to the floor to outline his school president manifesto:

-recruitment for first year class reps

-improving Kirkaldy representation

-lobbying for timetable improvements

5.2 Liam asked how Lucas will work on Kirkaldy representation. He responded by saying he would work on engaging them and spending time with Kirkaldy students.

5.3 Parissa asked Lucas how he would enhance DUSA services if he were elected. He responded by stating he would spend more time on campus engaging with students and informing them of the services available while also collating their feedback.

5.4 Dominic told the councillors that the voting forms were open. The councillors were asked to vote. The motion was announced passed by Obiozor; 14 votes in agreement.

**6. SHSL Co-president Motion**

6.1 Dominic introduced Clara to present her motion asking for the SRC and the DUSA Exec to approve and support the appointment of Erin MacInnes as a second School President so that Dani McFawns and Erin MacInnes can take over the role together at the end of their tenure in June 2023.

6.2 Clara outlined a rough estimate of their workload as current SHSL SP:

- 4300 students; 150 Class Representatives

- 9-10 hours of commitment per week while they managed their commitments

6.3 They then highlighted that Dani (the incoming elected SP) was happy to share the role with the SP runner up, Erin, to increase representation benefits.

6.4 Clara clarified that the workload would be shared or distributed equally among the co-presidents.

6.5 Ash highlighted in terms of legacy timeline this amendment would have to be discussed at Board level and presented by the VPR on the 5th of June in the chairperson's absence.

6.6 Prosper highlighted that the best way forward would be to decentralise to better understand student opinion making sure the role is clear. Clara clarified that this would function as a trial year to see if it works for the increased capacity of the school following the New Combined School (NCS) merge.

6.7 Dominic told the councillors that the voting forms were open. The councillors were asked to vote. The motion was announced passed by Obiozor; 14 votes in agreement.

**7. DUSA Exec and councillor support scheme motion**

7.1 Dominic invited Parissa to present her motion. Parissa shared the intention behind the motion as she took a retrospective look at previously passed motions that have not yet been actioned by the council. She then raised concerns around the continuity and communication around the motions, namely: the introduction of a Trans and Nonbinary representative, multifaith prayer space, bus shelter etc. Parissa proposed a support system to assign a member of the Exec and SVSO to aid in the support and delivery of the council ideas to ensure accountability.

7.2 Obiozor responded agreeing that this support system is required to streamline delivery but raised issue of ‘bottleneck’ of executive responsibilities and student representation as whole; sitting on countless university meetings she argues weakens representatives' ability to delivery passed motions.

7.3 Parissa suggested the need to increase accessibility and make use of knowledge, contacts and networking when delivering passed motions.

7.4 Amira raised the importance of withdrawing trust from members who are not active to ensure accountability and productivity of representative members. Parissa said that that would be the vote of no confidence.

7.5 Dominic told the councillors that the voting forms were open. The councillors were asked to vote. The motion was announced passed by Obiozor; 12 votes in agreement and 1 abstention.

**8. Kirkaldy Representative**

8.1 Parissa introduced a second motion; the introduction of a Kirkaldy representation position on the SRC with associated travel cost reimbursement. She argued that as a student's union and SRC we are failing to engage Kirkaldy students.

8.2 Eamonn suggested that the motion be voted on with the addition of milage to the travel reimbursements to increase accessibility for students who cannot access public transport.

**8.3** Dominic told the councillors that the voting forms were open. The councillors were asked to vote. The motion was announced passed by Obiozor; 13 votes in agreement.

**Standing Items:**

**9. SRC Question time – Pride flag: student inquiry**

9.1 Parissa read out an email she received from a student on the 13th of May from a student from Energy Law and Policy questioning the presence of the pride flag superimposed on the university shield on UoD Linked in. The student questioned if, ideologically, the profile remains neutral on this. Parissa opened the floor to discussion on this.

9.2 Andre stated that matter of supporting LGBTQIA+ students is more important than remaining impartial. Aaron raised the consequences of making it neutral; backlash within commitment to support LGBTQIA+ students.

9.3 Audrey suggested school of thought; internationals students within western institutions that are against LGBT+ rights within the gas and oil industry may see the inclusion of pride flags on their institutions profile as a hindrance to their employability outwith the western world.

9.4 Dominic asked for a show of hands for the matter to be raised with the institution to introduce neutral socials. By show of hands; 7 voted no, 1 maybe , 2 yes.