

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST STUDENTS' UNION

MINUTES

Special Meeting of the Students' Union Council
held on 2 February 2015 in The Space, Level 1, Students' Union

Present:

Anna-Leigh Hunter	School Rep, Modern Languages
Anthony McKee	AHSS
Aoibhin McNeill	EPS
Brendan Corr	Open
Caoimhe McNeill	EMC
Catherine Guy	AHSS
Chloe Patterson	EMC
Ciaran Gallagher	EMC
Colin Stevenson	EMC
Collette McAllister	AHSS
Connor Malone	PG
Conor Fearon	PG
Courtenay Mercer	School Rep, History and Anthropology
Derek Crosby	PG
Ellie Drake	AHSS
Fahad Alawsi	MHLS
Fergal McFerran	Open
Gareth Somerville	EPS
Hannah Niblock	EMC
Hayley Baird	MHLS
Helen Monaghan	MHLS
Jack Patterson	AHSS
James Rodgers	School Rep, GAP
Jan Sen Yu	AHSS
Jessica Simonds	School Rep, PISP
Jonathan Irwin	AHSS
Jordan McMullen	Open First Year
Kathryn Waller	AHSS
Katie Perry	AHSS
Kyle Moutray	Open First Year
Loren McIntyre	School Rep, Nursing and Midwifery
Mark Benson	PG
Matthew McCallion	School Rep, Law
Niall McKenna	EMC
Niall Robb	AHSS
Nyemahame Okwu	MHLS
Oisin Hassan	PG
Patrick Sally	EMC
Paul Loughran	EPS
Rachel Ireland	School Rep, English
Rebecca Kelly	School Rep, Creative Arts
Ruth Maxwell	Open
Sammy Wade	AHSS
Sarah Wright	Open
Sean Fearon	AHSS
Sophie Stratfull	AHSS
Sophie-Anna McClintock	Open
Stephen McCrystall	AHSS
Thomas Thompson	MHLS
Tiarnan McKeown	AHSS
Timothy McLean	Open

In Attendance:

Damien Corridan (Deputy Clerk of Council)
Dominic Doherty (Clerk of Council)
Orlaigh McIntyre (Marketing Manager)
Kristina Mulholland (Marketing Assistant)
Niamh McGovern (The Gown)
Kylie Noble (The Gown)
Paul Wyatt (The Scoop QUB – Queen's Radio)

Fergal McFerran (Union Speaker, in the Chair) welcomed all attendees to this Special Meeting.

946. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from the following Councillors:

Adam Sage	School Rep, Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences
Diane Murdock	School Rep, EEECS
Saoirse O'Neill	Open
Vicky-Leigh Young	School Rep, Chemistry and Chemical Engineering

947. MINUTES OF THE STATUTORY MEETING OF 4 DECEMBER 2014

These will be considered at the Statutory Meeting of 9 February 2015.

948. BUSINESS ARISING

There were none.

949. COMMUNICATIONS

The Council noted the following communications:

949.1 The Council considered appeals from the following Councillors who had been deemed to have resigned their seats on Council due to non-attendance:

Aoibhin McNeill	EPS
Loren McIntyre	School Rep, Nursing and Midwifery

The Council approved their reinstatement as members of the Council.

949.2 The Council approved the appointment by the Director of the Students' Union of Keelin McGrogan (NUS-USI) as Returning Officer for the 2015 elections to the Executive Management Committee.

950. REPORT OF THE STUDENTS' UNION OFFICER REVIEW GROUP

950.1 Derek Crosby (Postgraduate) and Chairperson of the Students' Union Officer Review Group provided a report on recent deliberations and recommendations of the Group, noting the following:

- In common with the University and the Higher Education sector as a whole, the Students' Union is experiencing serious funding pressures at this time – and the Union is obliged to identify savings in a number of areas including the non-recruitment of some vacant staff positions, the proposed collapsing / discontinuation of one existing staff post and a reduction in casual staff hours.
- It has recently been confirmed that there will be a reduction in funding to cover the cost of our elected student officers in 2015-16.
- At present, there are seven full-time elected officers who are paid a stipend of approximately £17,500 – current funding is therefore in the region of £122,500 (i.e. seven student officers x £17,500).
- For next academic year (2015-16), the Students' Union will only be funded for five student officers at the current rate of stipend – funding will therefore reduce from £122,500 to £87,500 (i.e. five student officers x £17,500).
- The Officer Review Group has considered this scenario and is offering a range of options for the next round of student officer elections – the Group has agreed that, in order to comply with the current Students' Union Constitution, all seven positions should be elected and no posts should be discontinued or merged at this time.

- The Group has also agreed that the posts of Union President, Vice President Education and Vice President Welfare are critical positions and should continue to be funded at an appropriate stipend level that reflects the core nature of these roles.
- As the funding environment for the years beyond 2015-16 is as yet unclear, the Council is being asked to agree an interim solution for the next set of student officer elections.
- If it is the decision of the Special Meeting of Council that one or more of the elected officer positions are to receive a stipend of zero, the Executive Management Committee will, at the earliest opportunity, meet with the officer(s) in question in order to address how the workload associated with that post(s) will be best delivered. The anticipated outcome is that a proportion of the work allocated to an unpaid officer(s) will be delivered by an officer(s) who is / are in receipt of a monetary stipend.

The following options were agreed by the Student Officer Review group for the consideration of Council:

OPTION 1

Elect the current seven positions and reduce the stipend level to £12,500 for each officer.

OPTION 2

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £14,584 except for the position of Vice President Campaigns and Communications (VPCC) which will receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 3

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £14,584 except for the position of Vice President Clubs and Societies (VPCS) which will receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 4

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £14,584 except for the position of Vice President Community (VPC) which will receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 5

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £14,584 except for the position of Vice President Equality and Diversity (VPE&D) which will receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 6

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Campaigns and Communications and Vice President Clubs and Societies, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 7

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Campaigns and Communications and Vice President Community, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 8

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Campaigns and Communications and Vice President Equality and Diversity, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 9

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Clubs and Societies and Vice President Community, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 10

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Clubs and Societies and Vice President Equality and Diversity, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

OPTION 11

Elect the seven positions – all posts to receive a stipend of £17,500 except for the two positions of Vice President Community and Vice President Equality and Diversity, which will each receive a stipend of zero.

Ciaran Gallagher (EMC) stated that:

- Discussions are currently underway with the University to find additional resources that could be used to meet the existing funding gap, to enable the election of seven student officers at the full stipend.
- This is not a position that anyone wished for the Union to be in
- The current proposals were a 'least worst' proposal as there were other very significant cuts on the table.
- It is hoped that the decision made by Council this evening will not have to be implemented

In response to a number of questions from the floor, Ciaran Gallagher (EMC) stated that:

- He believed that here is good faith being displayed by the University
- That every effort will be made to secure the additional funds
- There are long term funding issues, such as the resolution of loan repayments to the University
- It is unfortunate that the recent reduction in higher education funding has led us to this place
- The Union is campaigning to minimise the effect of the cuts on the Union and on students in general
- The University will not take the any decision by Council tonight as an endorsement of any proposed cuts
- The Union provided a list of options to the University where savings could be made. This included cuts that would have led to drastic level of service reduction in the Union. The reduction in the student officer stipend budget was only discussed as an option in order to protect front-line services provided to students.
- Discussions are currently underway with the University to find additional resources that could be used to meet the existing funding gap, to enable the election of seven student officers at the full stipend.
- The Union is not accepting cuts without a fight and is constrictively campaigning to against cuts to higher education and to Union funding.
- This is only a solution to the funding situation for elected student officers for the 2015-16 academic year.
- There is space over the coming months for Council to review the current elected student officer roles, on its own terms and identify the activities that ensure that the Union officers are responsive to the needs of students
- That, while there is much public commentary regarding the pay levels of senior staff in the University, those total value of those salaries alone is but a small fraction of the overall level of reduction in public funding for higher education.
- That the proposals before Council tonight were developed by elected Councillors.

Niall Bole stated that, from his previous experience as an elected student officer, it was possible to live on £12,500 and having seven officers on a low stipend was better than having an officer having to be completely self-funded.

Sarah Wright stated that the Union should do everything possible to oppose the cuts and keep seven offices, noting that OPTION 1 was a reasonable compromise, the VPE&D post being essential. The posts of VPCC and VPC were less essential.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, OPTION 5, OPTION 8 and OPTION 10 were eliminated.

Kathryn Waller stated that officers would still have disposable income on a stipend of £12,500.

Cliona McCarney stated that any officer stipend should be in line with the Union's Living Wage policy.

Jessica Simmonds stated that the VPCS role could be distributed amongst other roles.

Caoimhe McNeill stated that the VPE&D post was the only outlet for students with equality and diversity issues, including postgraduate, international, LGB+ and transgender issues, with no staff resources available to support these students.

Caoimhe McNeill further stated that student officer positions should be reviewed on this Union's terms, not just to implement cuts imposed by the University.

Jan Sen Yu stated that the VPE&D post should be maintained as students are more likely to approach a student than a staff member.

Oisín Hassan stated that OPTION 3 should be supported as there is staff support available for Clubs and Societies.

Niall McKenna stated that he was the only 'staff member', along with some part-time student assistants, as the staff support position has not been filled due to budget pressures and there was no guarantee that the post will be filled in the near future.

Niall Bole stated that, from his experience as a casual staff assistant and former VPCS, it was clear that Clubs and Societies needed support and that removing the post will essentially kill off small Clubs and Societies.

Helen Monaghan stated that it was essential to keep the VPCS post.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, OPTION 2, OPTION 6, OPTION 7 and OPTION 9 were eliminated.

Paul Fletcher (graduate, speaking with the approval of Council) stated that from his experience with the Origami Society, the VPCS post was vital and that it was too important to be a part time post.

Anthony McKee stated that the VPE&D post is very important, particularly as the university was recently declared to be the 20th most 'International University' in the world.

Jessica Simmonds stated that the VPE&D post should not be a full-time post and that OPTION 1 is the most realistic.

Connor Malone, stated that in his view, as RAG Chairperson, the VPC post is essential.

Sarah Wright, stated that, on reflection, her view was that it was not appropriate to give students a stipend of £12,500 and that the VPC post should be a part-time post.

Ciarán Gallagher stated that he believed that the VPCS and VPE&D posts should be maintained.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, there were no clear options for elimination. The Union Speaker ruled that debate shall continue.

Niall Robb state the he supported the selection of OPTION 1 and a more detailed consideration of officer positions can be performed in time.

Chloe Patterson stated that, in her view, the VPC role was essential to bring student together, to organise activities such as Street Reps

Caoimhe McNeill stated that she was against OPTION 1 as the VPE&D post is vital for campaigning on Union policy issues, such as transgender toilets, a reflection space, international welcome week and the international buddy scheme and the for participation in the Disability Forum.

Collette McAllister stated that OPTION 1 was the one that gave students the best representation.

Seán Fearon stated that Northern Ireland is one of the most regressive places in Europe and that the VPE&D position is essential.

Brendan Corr stated that the VPE&D post is vital and that OPTION 1 was against the living wage.

Niall McKenna that everyone stated that in his view a reasonable argument could be made to keep all of the posts and that he supported OPTION 1.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, OPTION 11 was eliminated.

Niall Bole stated tha the VPCS role should be kept.

Derek Crosby stated that a lower stipend level would reduce participation in elections but it was the decision that was easiest to reverse.

Sarah Wright stated that OPTION 1 would lead to the Union offering a 'poverty wage' as a stipend to student officers and that the Council should remove the VPC role as it was most likely that the University would resource this role.

Caoimhe McNeill stated that a £12,500 wage would detract student with caring responsibilities form becoming officers.

Seán Fearon stated that there no evidence that University will reduce the imposed cuts.

Hannah Niblock stated that it was her view that the University was not concerned with which option is selected by Council and that the important thing was to see which posts had the greatest impact on the most vulnerable students.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, OPTION 2 was eliminated.

Stephen McCrystal stated that it is possible for students to survive on a stipend of £14,500 and that OPTION 4 was the best option.

Aoibhin McNeill stated that all remaining options are poor ones with OPTION 4 was the least worse.

Mark Benson stated that the roles were largely for people who were seeking to develop their career and that a stipend of £12,500 was appropriate for the role.

Sarah Wright stated that there could be no one running if the stipend was reduced to £12,500 it would reduce participation in the election and the VPC post's responsibilities can be reallocated to other post holders.

Brendan Corr stated that while these decisions are difficult, the alternatives to cutting other areas of the Union's budget were more severe.

Niall Bole stated that removing the stipend for the VPC post was the most agreeable option.

It was proposed to proceed immediately to the vote – this was accepted.

Following a secret ballot, OPTION 1 was eliminated.

Therefore the Union Speaker declared that OPTION 4 had been approved by the Council.

950.2 The Council approved delegation of authority to the Executive Management Committee to reallocate responsibilities for the Vice President Community post to officer posts to that shall receive a stipend.

951. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

There was none.

952. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Union Speaker announced that the next Statutory Meeting of the Students' Union Council was scheduled to take place at 6.00 p.m. on Monday 9 February 2015 in The Space, Level 1, Students' Union.

DAMIEN CORRIDAN (Deputy Clerk, Students' Union Council)