

Union of UEA Students Purpose:

"To enrich the life of every UEA student"



Minutes of the Student Officer Committee

3 April 2014

Summary

Key Discussions

- Accommodation rent rises
- By-Election Timetable
- UCU Marking Boycott
- Spending Proposals for 2014-15 Budget
- Lobbying for increased general funding versus lobbying for funding for specific projects
- Results of UUEAS Annual Survey

Key Actions

- University to be asked what information has been given to incoming students about the rent rise
- SOC agreed the proposed By-Election Timetable but to move the manifesto deadline back to 11 May and to schedule an extra candidate training session
- Marking Boycott group to take campaign forward
- Agreed that there would be a special session during training to discuss strategic spending and campaigning priorities both in the short and long ter.

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Voting Members present:

Tu An Ngo (International Officer), Ella Gilbert (Non Portfolio Officer), Rosie Rawle (Communications Officer), Emma Silk (Environment Officer), L Withers Green (Academic Officer), Freddie Meade (Non Portfolio Officer), Bintu Foday (Community and Student Rights Officer), Kimberley Hirst-Jones (Postgraduate Officer), L Sloan (Ethical Issues Officer).

Officers Elect present:

Chris Jarvis (Campaigns and Democracy Officer), Tom Etheridge (Non Portfolio Officer), Max Levene (Students with Disabilities Officer), Connor Rand (UG Education Officer), Josh Wilson (Ethical issues Officer), Dolly Ogunrinde (Women's Officer), Iain Goddard (Environment Officer Elect), Dan Wrigglesworth (LGBT+ Officer).

Chair

Joe Raynes (Non Portfolio Officer).

Voting Members present:

J Dickinson (Chief Executive).

In attendance:

Tony Moore (Representation Support Worker).

Apologies:

Eunice Opare-Addo (Black & Ethnic Minorities Officer), L McCafferty (PG Education Officer Elect), Sebastian Bachelier (Non Portfolio Officer), Holly Staynor (LGBT+ Officer). Yinbo Yu (Activities & Opportunities Officer Elect).

1185 Welcome to newly elected Officers
Chair welcomed the newly elected Officers to SOC.

1186 Minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2014
The minutes were agreed.

1187 Matters Arising

There were none.

1188 Action Log

SOC noted the completed actions.

B Foday noted on she had contacted the University who had got back to her with the news that they had already set the rent rise and had published the information in February. She noted her shock at this news as she had believed that the University would have held prior consultations with UUEAS. She noted UUEAS was faced with a fait accompli and that this was disappointing in that Council had mandated SOC to campaign against the rise.

R Rawle believed there was still an opportunity to campaign on the issue and to alert incoming students to the rise.

B Foday noted that there had been some progress in that the University had agreed to invite future Welfare, Community & Diversity Officers to rent setting meetings and that UUEAS staff would be involved to ensure continuity.

R Rawle noted she had tried to find information about the rise online but she had not been able to find it; she believed the University should be pressed to make information on the rise more immediately available. She noted that she would be interested to know what information had been given to incoming students.

L Withers Green argued that a foundation should be laid for a campaign against future rent rises.

SOC agreed that investigations should be made as to what information had been given to incoming students.

1189 By-Election Timetable

SOC noted the difficulties of running a by-election during the exam period.

SOC agreed the proposed timetable but to move the manifesto deadline back to 11 May and to schedule an extra candidate training session.

1190 UCU Industrial Action: Marking Boycott

R Rawle noted some members had expressed anger over the proposed boycott and some of the anger had been directed at the position UUEAS had taken. She noted she had had a meeting with one of the UCU branch reps and she had also met with the University.

At the request of the Chair, R Rawle gave a quick overview of the events leading up to the boycott. She noted that UCU had for the preceding six months been trying to engage with university employers over lecturers' pay. She noted that the UCU's claims were not only for a fair pay rate but a decrease in the gender gap and an end to zero hours contracts and this made the situation somewhat complex. She noted that there had been four or five strikes during this period and, although the withdrawal of labour had only lasted a couple of hours, the University had punitively docked the strikers a day's pay. She noted that there was a long history of precedent of UUEAS' support for UCU industrial action and this was backed up by recently passed policy. She noted that NUS supported the

boycott and that, several weeks previously, SOC had confirmed its support. She noted that UCU would implement the boycott only as a last resort. She noted that there were 500 UCU members at UEA and that the UCU rep had no idea how many of these would take part. She noted that there was no requirement for the UCU members to inform the University whether they would be taking part until the 28th April; so this made it more difficult to estimate the numbers. She noted, however, that the University were planning Congregation to take place as normal. She noted, as to communications, UUEAS had a section on the blog focused on the boycott, with FAQs and guidance on what students could do such as emailing the Vice-Chancellor. She noted that many students had already written to the VC to ask that staff demands were met. She noted that there had been criticism of UUEAS via social media which decried UUEAS for supporting an action that would disadvantage students. She felt that UUEAS had done well in responding individually to each criticism.

E Gilbert asked that a template of key facts should be put together so that Officers could make a quick response to queries from their constituents.

R Rawle noted she would compile a bullet point list for Officers to use.

R Rawle noted that it had been agreed at Council that the best way to protect students from any disruption to their studies was to attempt to ensure that the boycott did not go ahead and that the way to do this was to pressurise the University to come to a fair solution for staff.

C Rand believed that anyone who had been engaged in the social media debate would know that the level of noise and anger over the boycott was at a high level. He thought this confirmed the importance of UUEAS putting in place a series of practical steps as to how to engage the members and explain the case to them. He noted that he felt that UUEAS was losing this particular battle because the boycott was a last resort for staff after a long series of industrial actions and UUEAS had not adequately set out its position or engaged students during these previous actions and, consequently, students did not see the boycott in its historical context of deteriorating staff conditions and the marketisation of education. He underlined the importance to the goal of building solidarity between students and lecturers of having a well-thought out communication strategy.

R Rawle noted a lot of work had been done through the Fair Pay Campus and Anti-Student Debt campaigns and by a high profile UUEAS presence at the earlier industrial actions. She believed, however, that there had not been enough contribution from SOC as a body and that it would be important for all Officers to involve themselves in the campaign from this point on.

L Withers Green believed the key argument should be that, in the long term, UUEAS support for the boycott would benefit students as it could be vital in helping UCU achieve a successful resolution of the dispute.

R Rawle noted, as to the future campaign, one of the ideas that had been mooted had been to distribute 'I Support My Staff' and 'What's Going On' flyers combined with a poster campaign. She wondered how appropriate SOC would think it to be to have these messages in the big poster boards around Union House. She also asked SOC to consider whether the publicity material should be sophisticated design quality or should be hand painted. She thought a popular tool would be to hand

out stickers for students to wear to show solidarity with staff. She noted she had also discussed with the UCU the possibility of a UCU rep coming to address an open meeting. She noted a small ad hoc group had been working on the campaign and she suggested that this group should continue to do so with current Officers and Officers elect welcome to join them. She thought the group could come up with a staged plan with dates.

SOC agreed that the group would be responsible for taking the campaign forward and that the meetings would be publicised on the SOC Facebook page.

J Wilson thought it would be good to publish any FAQs that the UCU had issued.

R Rawle noted she had used these for the basis of the information she had put out.

E Gilbert believed it was not for UUEAS but for UCU to explain why their members were going on strike.

R Rawle noted she would ask the UCU branch for more detailed information to include.

1191

Budget Ideas 2014-15

Chair noted that Officers had been asked at the previous meeting as to which areas they would like money to be targeted at to improve services. Officers made the following contributions:

E Gilbert: more staff support for Officers' campaigns on publicity and more money to spend on publicity material for demonstrations

L Withers Green: more staff support for representation to bring UUEAS up to the level of support at unions of a similar size as the current level was not sufficient to adequately represent the members

Chair: dedicated LGBT+ support

T A Ngo: dedicated staff support for international students and staff support for Liberations Officers in general

R Rawle: suggested group work using manifestos and Officer priorities to design a set of overall holistic priorities that SOC could feed into the budget process

T Etheridge: noted this could be a similar process to the Priority Campaigns Poll

L Sloan wondered if the idea was to put forward specific projects to ask the University to fund; because, if this was the case, it would be totally against the approach that the Block Grant Committee had agreed to take concerning approaches for increased funding.

R Rawle agreed and noted that Council had passed policy to seek an overall increase in funding rather than tied funding as UUEAS needed to keep control of its spending priorities. She noted she had seen a paper at Management Committee with a number of possible funding requests around specific projects and she had asked that this be brought to SOC.

L Sloan believed it was not a question of which committee considered the matter; it was the fundamental principle that policy stated that Officers should be asking for a higher block grant rather than funding for specific

projects.

L Withers Green noted that for the entire year she had been very openly lobbying the University for extra funding for representation and she believed it would be disastrous to row back and wait on an uncertain increase to the Block Grant.

J Dickinson advised that there were two strands for SOC to address: firstly, what UUEAS spent its existing money on and, secondly, what UUEAS might spend new money on and its subsidiary question as to making the University aware of how any new money would be spent in order to consequently secure new money from the University. He advised that, even if SOC deferred making a decision on either a specific project with defined costs or a broader spending proposal, SOC would still have some slack in what UUEAS could spend its money on in the coming year. He noted that one of the points of the budget setting policy had been to put SOC into the driving seat as to what the spending priorities should be rather than just, as in the past, being given the ability to make minor changes to a £15,000 Campaigns Budget. He noted that, even if there were no new money, UUEAS would still be able to deliver on some of SOC's spending priorities.

L Sloan asked why UUEAS was sacking people if there was money available and where the money was located. She noted that she had heard statements such as this throughout the year and her reluctance to sit in SOC and hear this repeated. She wondered why UUEAS had been forced to make cuts in order to survive if there was spare money available.

J Dickinson advised that the matter concerned not just a process of a reduction in the overall number of staff but, also, the way in which a whole range of services were delivered and some of the changes to service delivery would generate savings. He noted, as an example, that he was currently reviewing UUEAS' insurance policies which could result in savings of £10,000 and this was the type of new money that he had been alluding to. He noted that, in order to break even, UUEAS had not only reduced the number of staff but had also completely changed the staffing structure which would also mean cost savings. He noted that as UUEAS got closer to building the finalised budget for the coming year, as Chief Executive, he would need a political steer as to where money should be targeted.

L Sloan noted her belief that the money should be spent on UUEAS staff; it was simple, if UUEAS had spare money, it should not sack people.

J Dickinson advised that this was one possible view to take on the matter.

SOC agreed that there would be a special session during training to discuss strategic spending and campaigning priorities both in the short and long term.

T A Ngo cautioned that SOC would be leaving the matter to newly elected Officers who would not be able to bring the experience of office to the discussions.

R Rawle noted that the present PTO team would be fully involved in the discussions.

1992

UUEAS Annual Survey

J Dickinson noted that some of the results of the survey highlighted representational and political issues that were within SOC's remit. He noted he would circulate the full report to the incoming Officers. He noted that there had been a record number of students taking part in the survey and he was happy that the survey was broadly representative of the student body.

He noted that, in the current marketised system, an important aspect of the survey was that it gauged which of UUEAS' services had played a part in students choosing to come to UEA. He noted the new HEFCE research that indicated that students often made a choice on emotional grounds and then justified their decision in terms of choosing the best course on offer in order to appear to have been making a rational, informed choice. He pointed to the importance of accommodation affecting choice and noted UEA was a fairly rare example of an institution trying to house as many first year students as possible on campus.

He noted the importance that students attached to the Shop as a service and he argued that there was a lot more that UUEAS might do, in terms of campaigns, to engage students when they used the Shop.

He highlighted the key areas of concern for students as: academic achievement, academic workload, he noted this was very high in comparison to other universities due to the high level of contact time at UEA, finance, faith, mental health issues and parking. On mental health, he noted that national research had shown that there were, due to the lack of care provision, an increasing number of students providing make do, amateur support for their peers; he believed this was an area the new Officer team might wish to examine.

He noted the variations from School to School in student responses as to UUEAS' effectiveness in course representation and that this would be something for the new Education Officers to investigate.

He noted the paradox that most of the truly effective representation work undertaken by the Officers took place in University committees and of which students were mostly unaware. He noted that this would be an aspect of communication that Officers would wish to address.

He noted the data on which campaigns meant most to students and suggested that this would highlight the areas UUEAS should target to raise awareness of. He noted the high scores for coursework return and exam timetables. He further noted the growth in concerns over Zero Tolerance and 'Lad Culture' and that this was part of a significant national trend. On communications, he noted that over 80% of the respondents wanted a daily email and that UUEAS was focused on delivering this and would continually push for a completion of the data sharing agreement. He hoped that by September the daily email would be a reality and he believed this would be an exciting development.

On transparency and decision making, he thought the figures compared reasonably well with those for other students' unions.

On the final 'killer question' on the extent of UUEAS' positive impact on student lives, he noted this was down 11% from the previous year to 65% and that this might be due to a number of factors, possibly including the restructuring of commercial services. He felt that it would be interesting to see whether the 65% would feed into the NSS Question 23 score.

1993 Management Committee Minutes

SOC received the minutes of the meeting of 27 March without comment.

1994 Officer Go Round

E Gilbert: UCU Marking Boycott

K Hirst-Jones: Postgraduate aspect of the UCU Marking Boycott as to implications for marked work and for markers, GSA Officer handover, NUS PG Conference and organising Music Nights at the Grad Bar

L Withers Green: 100 things the VC could change, What If your course was better and working on Faculty Convenors recruitment

L Sloan: noted that, for the first time in the current year, she had concentrated on her degree work and had nothing to report

R Rawle: marking boycott, hustings for the local and the European elections on 1 May, Defend Education Campaign

F Meade: marking boycott

B Foday: finalising the Time to Change campaign with a mass pledge signing in May, Faith on Campus meetings with the University and Islamic Society, Access Agreement focus groups

E Silk: Stop The Sell Off and meetings with the University over Fossil Free investment

TA Ngo: reported a UEA student who was a TV anchor-man in Kazakhstan had had some of his colleagues film the UEA Go Global Party and this had been broadcast on Kazakh national TV

J Raynes: explain the marking boycott to students

1995 Any Other Business

R Rawle proposed a thank you to all the Part Time Officers for all their work during what had turned out to be a roller coaster of a year.

T A Ngo noted she would be organising a goodbye social after Easter.

R Rawle noted that all departing Officers would be invited to training as it would be good to have as many one-to-one handovers as possible and that FTOs would be available for briefings outside of scheduled training.

B Foday noted that getting the training dates set as soon as possible should be noted as an action point.

1996 Time, Date and Place

5 pm, Thursday, 3 April in a venue to be confirmed.