

Assembly minutes – 14 February 2018

Matt Gibson welcomed everybody to the meeting.

The Chair asked for good order in the meeting, recognising the strength of feeling in the room. He then asked George Walker to propose the motion.

GW spoke to his motion, and invited questions. Assembly members asked:

- For clarification on what an 'effective strike' would be.
- How this motion would helpfully impact students.
- How an effective strike could minimise disruption on students.

Alexandra Thomas proposed 4 amendments, in turn.

Amendment 1

AT spoke to their amendment, and the importance of solidarity.

A member spoke in favour, on the need to find a consensus that the majority of students would support.

A member spoke against, on the inability to find a middle ground, and the importance of sticking to principles.

A member spoke against, on the unnecessary nature of the amendment as it changed little in the substantive motion.

A member spoke in favour, and the importance of good pensions.

A member spoke against, and about the imbalances of the future of the academic career market.

A member spoke for, and the way in which an attack on academic pensions must be seen as a general fight, which will come to have an impact on us all.

Amendment 1 falls.

Amendment 2

AT spoke to their amendment, and their view that the way to minimise the impact is, in fact, to support the strike; weakening strike action makes the impact worse as it makes industrial action last longer.

A member spoke against, on the first part of the amendment: it seeks something which would infuriate students – both can be done but the SU must stand up for the student interest first. A failure to do so would undermine the legitimacy of SU.

A member spoke for, on how supporting strikes now would mean better outcomes for students in longer term.

A member spoke against, as there could be no tolerance for any impact on students' ability to progress of graduate.

Amendment 2 falls.

The Chair, at this point, reminded members of the importance of respectful debate.

Amendment 3

AT spoke to their amendment, and reiterated that supporting staff leads to less disruption, not more.

A member spoke against and regretted that miscommunication would lead students into thinking that missing lectures is OK, when there are broader considerations about access to professional services, legally required checks, and so on. We should urge students to access help that they need to.

A member spoke for and the benefit of pressure that comes from visible and effective picket lines.

A member spoke against, on the basis that while the SU should support the protest, the tactics were specific choices and amendment was therefore unacceptable.

A member spoke for, and how not crossing picket lines is a clear demonstration of support, which is the point of the motion.

A member spoke against, and urged students not to engage with the picket lines at all.

A member spoke against, stating that access to services is important, and the complex points had not been communicated well.

A member spoke for, sharing their belief that access to services would not be crossing a picket line.

Amendment 3 falls.

Amendment 4

AT spoke to their amendment and their anger that the Uni obligation to deliver education is, in fact, compromised by their own position. The Uni has the sole power to resolve this.

A member spoke against on the basis that the amendment sought to delete 'swift resolution', and seeks to delete 'using students as bargaining chips'.

A member spoke for and the lack of distinction between students and staff interests. Students are also staff, and have union rights, particularly with PGR students.

A member spoke against because while unions have solidarity they can and so have different interests.

A member spoke for, as a student who teaches and has no contradiction on shared interests; the member resented the claim that students used as chips.

A member spoke against because students were, in fact, being used as bargaining chips – dissertation hand-in, lectures etc.

A member spoke for, and was clear that students were not intentional bargaining chips. The withdrawal of labour, for academic staff, left them with very few other options for academic staff.

A member spoke against, because while there was no artificial separation, UCU do want swift resolution, and do want to affect the Uni with as little negative consequence for students.

A member spoke against because the amendment sought to delete the points about swift resolution, and student interests. To pass the amendment would be to separate students from SU and would undermine the legitimacy of both.

A member spoke for, because a swift resolution would be a strong strike, which would put pressure on Uni.

Amendment 4 falls.

The substantive motion survives amendments

The Chair invited members to speak to the motion as originally proposed.

A member spoke against, and urged Assembly to support the plight of staff, but vote the motion down because there could be zero tolerance for negative impact on students.

A member spoke for because UCU didn't ask for this dispute, and it is totally not OK to attack pensions.

A member spoke against, because the SU's role was clearly to take a stronger line on students' rights.

A member spoke for, and was aware of the impact on students, but also thought it could be a hell of a lot worse. The threat on academics now requires us to take action.

A member spoke against, for improved conditions for staff and a world class education. The University needs the best staff but the SU should focus on there being no impact on students, and any position in support of disruption is not OK.

A member spoke for, as there was no false distinction between staff and student interests. It was entirely in students' interests to tolerate some disruption in order to maintain world class academics.

The motion carried.