

Guild Council
Friday 14th October 2020, 3pm
Microsoft Teams Online Meeting

Welcome

The Guild Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Present: Guild President, VP Activities, VP Education, VP Welfare and Diversity, and the College Officers for Humanities (Guild Chair), SSIS, CMH, EMPS (intermittent connection), and the Business School.

Apologies: none received.

In attendance: Interim Director of Membership Engagement, Student Voice Manager, Student Governance Coordinator, Academic Impact Coordinator.

Notification of any other business

None.

1. FOR DECISION: approval of the minutes from the last meeting.

Council voted on the minutes from the last meeting. The result was:

YES: 5

NO: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

The minutes of the meeting of 4 September 2020 were therefore approved.

2. FOR DECISION: Appealed application for Student Group Affiliation.

The Guild Chair provided the context for this item: The recommendations which Council passed last meeting instructed further investigation of the appeal of the Human Rights Society and possible overlap with existing societies. The paper was taken as read.

VP Education feels very strongly about the recommendations made in the paper (to not affiliate the society) and invited questions. She noticed strongly in the investigation the idea of a cultural barrier for Asian students and students from other ethnic minority backgrounds to get involved in political activities and campaigning (like Amnesty International – mostly white members). From reading the appeal of Human Rights Society (appeared to be made up of mainly Asian students) it seems to be an issue of cultural barriers to involvement. One of the recommendations is to work on inclusion.

The College Officer for CMH asked for more detail on cultural barriers.

VP Education responded by saying it was more a matter of belonging than conflict. She said she thinks the way that campaign groups like Amnesty approach this is quite western-centric and focus on really big issues or campaigns, rather than what would resonate with Asian students. The Human Rights Society representative did not come to the investigation meeting. The Human Rights Society

did not cite any actual conflict but felt excluded. Amnesty Society are really open to outreach work and making their society more attractive to students from other ethnic minorities.

Council voted on the recommendation. The result was:

YES: 6

NO: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

The recommendation was therefore passed. The Human Rights Society's appeal has been rejected; it will not be affiliated.

3. FOR DECISION: byelaw amendments following the departure of VP Postgraduate.

The Guild Chair invited the Student Governance Coordinator to give a presentation on this item: the proposal is for a Doctoral College Officer as the student leader and representative for research students to be elected this term. The VP Postgraduate left the role last month to take up a scholarship and Trustee Board decided to replace this role with a new role of Doctoral College Officer (paid, part-time – similar to Pro-VP PGR).

As part of the Officer Review, it has been identified that there is a lack of focus for PG representation and only dedicated roles are at the executive level and not at the College Officer level. The majority of PGT students fall into the academic colleges and the PGR with the Doctoral College. All other roles are being reviewed and will be discussed in the future. The byelaw changes (to Byelaw 4 and the Transitional Arrangements for Guild Council) required were outlined.

The Guild Chair asked if the role would only apply to PGR students. The Guild President confirmed that it only applies to postgraduate research students. As VP Postgraduate, found that the interests of PGRs and PGTs often conflicted and the University would often talk to VP Education about PGTs. The Doctoral College does not have a College Officer and this causes communication issues. Postgraduate students need representation; there is currently a gap.

The Guild Chair asked if PGRs would be represented by this new role and PGTs by existing College Officers. The Guild President confirmed, and this differentiates between PGR and PGT. VP Education added the PGTs have always been under the remit of College Officer, but this has not always been made clear and this is why this new role is important. It matches with the University's structure and how they see students.

A current PhD student in attendance added: this role is important. Three years ago, with some other students, had to fight very hard to get a PG role. Prior PGs had no representation, no one to support them. For Sabbatical Officers, it is too much for them to also look after PGRs. PGRs have different issues to taught students (e.g. families, mortgages, offices, funding requirements) and are uniquely between staff and students. It's a community which has already been forgotten by the University and, in the past, the Guild. Over the last few years, the PGR experience has got better. If this role does not go forward, there will be many unhappy PGRs.

The College Officer for CMH asked what the difference between VP Postgraduate and the Doctoral College Officer. The Guild President responded with that the PGR students are less engaged a

access to the Guild is more taught student focussed. PGRs need specialised representation and support.

Interim Director of Membership Engagement offered some background - the roles prior to VP Postgraduate: Pro-VP PGR and Pro-VP PGT which were part-time, aside from the College Officers and below the full-time officers. This proposal means we create the Doctoral College Officer alongside the other College Officers and unify PGR student representation in the structure based on the structure of the University rather than an add-on. This is to make PGR student representation part of the Guild, rather than an add-on.

The College Officer for SSIS asked that if they do ratify the proposal, what happens about filling that position. VP Activities invited the Interim Director of Membership Engagement to respond: there is an election ready to go, probably for mid November. We need to get the byelaws changed first. The role would be for the rest of this academic year. Trustee Board have said we need to elect a PGR representative, and this is the role the Officers are putting forward. We will run straight into an election once ratified by Trustee Board.

VP Education added that she has unofficially picked up PGR student representation in the interim, so direct PGR issues to her until the Doctoral College Officer is in position. The Guild President added that VP Education is doing a good job at this.

The Academic Impact Coordinator raised a question from the meeting chat about what conversations have been had with the Doctoral College about this. The Guild President answered that the VP Postgraduate was working on this before departure. The College Officers are better integrated.

Council voted on the proposed amendments to Byelaw 4 and the Transitional Arrangements to Guild Council. The result was:

YES: 6

NO: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

The byelaw amendments were therefore passed by Council. The amendments will be sent to Trustee Board to be considered for ratification.

4. FOR DECISION: byelaw amendments to change the rules for elections.

The Guild Chair invited the Student Governance Coordinator to give a presentation on this item: we are holding an election very soon (they always were going to need to be considered). First set of changes outlined was whether to codify established practise concerning election budget reporting, or to change the practise. Then gave some headlines from the NUS elections report. Then outlined proposed byelaw changes to remove overreach, with the principle that the Guild should not regulate where it cannot effectively enforce. The Guild Chair gave an opportunity for questions.

Council voted on the proposed amendments to Byelaw 3. The result was:

YES: 5

NO: 0

ABSTAIN: 2

The byelaw amendments were therefore passed by Council. The amendments will be sent to Trustee Board to be considered for ratification.

5. FOR INFORMATION: Student groups and COVID-19.

The Guild Chair provided the context for this item: Last meeting Council discussed the impact of COVID-19 on student groups and considered what byelaw amendments might be required (following a proposal by a student). A lot has happened with Government and University regulations since then, so VP Activities will provide and update and advice on any required next steps.

VP Activities said that this will have to be discussed at the next meeting. This is because it was decided that would need to go back to the student who proposed this to see if we could fix the raised issues but have not done this yet. It will either come to next meeting following this discussion or will be resolved out of meeting.

Action: The Student Governance Coordinator to add this to the next meeting's agenda.

VP Activities asked the Interim Director for Membership Engagement to provide a general update on student groups: outlined the operational approach – the Guild spent summer planning society events, then the University made the decision to cancel in-person events due to potential for transmission. Have engaged with the University, health and safety colleagues, and Public Health. Have been asking the University to reconsider this over the last few weeks. This is because the venues are covid-secure and our activities are risk-assessed, and we believe student leaders are able to manage the risks associated. We have put forward a phased return based on the guidance (sports, education, volunteering, certain faith activities). The operational plan is being prepared and it then moves to representation for the officers to push the University to make that decision.

VP Activities added that have been having conversations with the University for months, e.g. education events should be exempt, and are making progress. It is difficult because the University has now implemented a 'soft' student lockdown and while that happens, they are not allowing activity. Last week, VP Activities and Guild President had a meeting with the Cabinet Office and the main thing put to them was society events and feel that they listened to how it effects the student experience. Today have been talking about transparency, had a conversation with the Registrar about having a 'town hall' meeting where student can talk to the people making these decisions.

The College Officer for CMH asked that students are in lockdown, but societies are still going ahead.

The Interim Director of Membership Engagement added that the Officers decided that safe regulated activity in student groups which disperses the student population across safe venues on campus is a much safer approach to keeping students entertained and socialised rather than a full-scale lock-down as provides a safe outlet and provide for student welfare.

6. FOR INFORMATION: Guild Council budget.

The Guild Chair invited the Student Governance Coordinator to give a presentation on this item. The academic representation budget was barely used last year. This fund still exists (represente

budget + officer budget = £2,750 + £2,750 = £5,000). This is for part-time officers – i.e. College Officers. It can be drawn out monthly, or in larger allocations. This under the authority of the Student Voice Manager as the budget holder but how it is used is down to College Officers in pursuing manifesto aims. Talk to each other and to the Voice team.

The Guild Chair asked if it was just for the College Officers or can the Subject Chairs know about it.

The Interim Director of Membership Engagement responded that it is up to College Officers as to how to spend. This is a public meeting, and we need to be transparent about it. But also see if we can get the University pay for things (and they are often quite happy to do this). This budget is a bit like seed funding for manifesto work.

The Guild Chair asks if Subject Chairs can approach the team or go through College Officers. The Interim Director of Membership Engagement said that would want College Officers to be involved in those discussions and also to see if can work across colleges.

The Student Governance Coordinator added that the discussion filters up to College Officers who discuss it together, otherwise each could be promising their Subject Chairs the same money, and this helps manage expectations.

The Interim Director of Membership Engagement also said that there are lots of pots of money in the University which can be applied to.

Action: Voice team to look into creating a guide to the pots of money.

7. Any other business.

None.

The meeting ended at 4:20pm.