

Guild Council
Thursday 19th November 2020, 12:30pm
Microsoft Teams Online Meeting

Welcome

The Guild Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Present: VP Activities, VP Education, College Officers: CO-Hums (Guild Chair), CO-SSIS, and CO-EMPS.

Apologies: Guild President (proxy to VP Activities), VP Welfare and Diversity, CO-BS (proxy to CO-SSIS) and CO-CMH (proxy to CO-SSIS).

In attendance: Interim Director of Membership Engagement (IDME), Student Voice Manager, Student Governance Coordinator, Academic Impact Coordinator, Archaeology Subject Chair, Nick Smith.

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: 7

NO: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

The minutes of the meeting of 14 October 2020 were therefore approved.

2. FOR INFORMATION: COVID-19 Update - Student Groups.

VP Activities invited IDME to provide an update: the bylaw amendment proposed by a student in the September meeting has been withdrawn following a meeting between that student and VP Activities and IDME (no further action for Council). About to consult societies on society memberships. Due diligence with risk and compliance. Continually adapting operational approach during crisis.

VP Education asked about the society affiliation process. VP Activities said that it is not being advertised due to capacity (Societies Coordinator vacancy), the current process is email to VP Activities to discuss if time appropriate due to capacity and covid restrictions. Once new Society Coordinator in place hope to open normal affiliation process.

3. FOR INFORMATION: COVID-19 Update - Education.

VP Education has been working on no detriment policy (or alternative) to protect student outcomes. Have been working with a student who started an open letter about this. The University's position is that they will not create a new blanket policy but rely on current policy. VP Education working on current policies are adequate and certain rules relaxed (e.g. retrospective mitigation). Had meeting with DVC Education – encouraging that senior staff wanting to hear from students and promise further meetings to clarify policies.

VP Education has also been part of NUS' campaign 'Students Deserve Better' – want to hold digital townhall meetings to hold members of Parliament accountable. Ben Bradshaw MP is coming to Exeter's next Wednesday (25 Nov, 4:30-6:30pm) so students will be able to convey their concerns and priorities. Also meeting with NUS President and Vice President tomorrow to talk about issue that NUS could raise. Inspired political education events. Financial support for students – covid amplifying inequalities. Pandemic is making think more creatively about work.

The student who started the no detriment campaign praised VP Education for the support. The response to the letter has been very quick. Disappointed that the University is not changing its position, but think the University is hearing them. Set up a group called Students for Mitigation and in process of drafting a national version of letter.

The Guild Chair asked about the retrospective mitigation. VP Education said it had already been in place but found that really hard for students to qualify for that. It needs to be more relaxed (e.g. cannot easily get to GP).

The student from Students for Mitigation added that it is not health issues or mental health issue that will affect student performance this year, also the nature of online learning. Argument is that if teaching has been changed then the assessments should be changed. Recognise that the University has done massive efforts to provide quality teaching.

IDME highlighted this as a good piece of campaign work. Also wanted emphasis the expertise of the Guild to support and resource campaigns. Reiterate that the relationship between the student union and the University and can get further than direct student action. Encourage students running campaigns to work with the Guild.

4. FOR INFORMATION: The Guild's Governance Review.

Nick Smith (consultant, background as SU officer, experience of University and SU governance) gave overview of the Governance Review:

- Governance is how decisions are made.
- The Guild is a charitable company. 2 types of members: students and trustees. It must be democratic.
- Articles are the rule book, external facing. More or less the same at each SU. Byelaws are unique. Nick is reviewing the articles and Kath is reviewing the democracy.
- Articles need to be future proof, flexible, good practice from sector, student led, formatting updated. Most staying the same; proposed changes: appoint (not elect) student trustees, not replace FTO mid-year, trustee benefits updates, administrative byelaw change process, admin and flexibility (e.g. no. of trustees)
- Next: legal check, will be online for student comment, Trustees decide final version, Council will be asked to approve, Trustee Board approves, University Council approves, Queen agrees. Expected to be with Guild Council end of Jan, and everything ready for next academic year.

5. FOR INFORMATION: Updates from the Full-Time Officers.

VP Activities is mainly working on the Get Connected campaign to support students who are feeling isolated and lonely: pen pals, events, blogs, Here To Talk (call centre to call to check in on students), events for Christmas, working with platforms. Also working on review of governance.

The Guild Chair asked what was happening over Christmas. VP Activities explain that there will be an 'evacuation period' 4-9 December – the University will be sending out more information – when student can leave and testing. IDME understands that the last few weeks of term will be online-only and there will not be in-person activity. VP Education encouraged students to pass on feedback as will be in meetings with senior University management.

VP Education is working on a roadshow town hall campaign. Has been successful in Maths (100 students came, 10 become pen pals) so will do some more (open to suggesting about which subjects want one).

VP Activities added that the election for Doctoral College Officer is today, voting closes at 10pm – encourage PGR students to vote.

6. FOR DISCUSSION: Guild Council budget - discussing options.

At the last Council meeting, the £5,000 budget was introduced. It is potentially quite difficult to use this money with everything having to be online (and therefore free). The ideas were:

- Publicity material for reps (business cards, posters, social media)
- Activist training for students (speaker fees and expenses)
- Online concerts (social contact – get connected)
- Employability events (speakers, requirements)
- Puppies for mental health
- PG study conferences

The Guild Chair expressed confusion as to what Guild Council's budget is for, when colleges and departments also have pots of money. IDME responded all Guild funding comes from University, but also look how University can use additional funding first of all. But Guild can use our money for work that the University would never fund (e.g. a campaign). The University needs to fund the things it needs to.

The Guild Chair said that wanted to have an EDI event / symposium but cannot do this as cannot to do in-person event (as the personal interactions before and after the main event are really valuable - networking). Do not think breakout rooms are effective. VP Activities said are working with platform Icebreaker which pairs people up to talk to each other and icebreaker cards. Term two, might be an option. The Guild Chair asks who needs to approve events. IDME said if it is backed by the department has a process for approval and risk assessment, and the Guild mirrors that for student groups. There is less regulation for internal speakers (student and staff) than external (including alumni). It does not matter who hosts it, as long as the process is done.

7. Any other business.

None.

The meeting ended at 1:55pm.