

Guild Council
Monday 15 February 2021, 15:00
Microsoft Teams Online Meeting

Welcome

The Guild Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting.

Attendance and Apologies for Absence

Present: Guild President, VP Activities, VP Education, VP Welfare and Diversity, CO-SSIS, CO-Hums (Guild Chair), CO-CMH, and CO-CLES.

Apologies: none.

In attendance: Student Voice Manager (SVM), Student Governance Coordinator (SGC), and Academic Impact Coordinator.

The meeting was declared quorate.

Notification of any other business

CO-CMH asked about attendance at TEM (Teaching Excellence Monitoring) meetings. VP Education said the invitation should go to all subject chairs so COs can delegate to Subject Chairs or Reps.

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 13 January 2021 were therefore approved.

2. FOR INFORMATION: update on the Democracy Review.

VP Activities shared an update in the Democracy Review: all the changes needed for the election have been passed and the nominations are open. All were encouraged to share this with students. Structures (panels, councils, etc.) are still under review. There is a workshop tomorrow (all invited) to look at policy development, accountability, appointment, and decision making. Ideas can be passed on to SGC. Changes should be ready by March meeting of Council.

CO-SSIS asked about when a list of candidates in the election would be released. CO-Hums added that supporting students who have approached them but do not know of others. The SGC responded that nominations are confidential until the Guild publicly announces the approved candidates (start of March). Officers need to give equal support to those who approach them – do not need to go out of their way to reach out to people.

3. FOR DISCUSSION: COVID-19 and Tuition Fees.

Council has received two agenda submissions from students around the value for money of tuition fees in this year (summarised on the [agenda](#)).

VP Education had encouraged students to submit agenda items on the issue of fees. Need to recognise that the Guild does not impose fees and cannot decide if students have to pay. But believe it would be good for the Guild to vote on a stance on the issue so could publicly lobby on this cause. VP Education has worked with NUS's campaign to get the Government to finance the refunds as to not bankrupt the universities. Also involved with Students United Against Fees campaign.

VP Education continued - students should not be negatively impacted so universities can finance themselves. What students, especially international students, have received for what they pay for is quite appalling. Officers' meetings with University senior management have shown that their view is they have spent more money and are unsympathetic. The Guild has had consistent feedback on tuition fees. Not every student has a loan to cover the costs.

CO-CMH agreed and had raised issue with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) but they rejected any idea of compensation or refund. Speaking from own experience of paying £50K a year this is unacceptable and unsympathetic (as college often incurs higher fees). CMH is probably least affected as still has loads of placements going on, but learning is still affected. This issue is being overlooked by the University.

CO-SSIS agrees that Council should vote on a stance. A student in the law SSLC said they felt 'resentment towards the University' in terms of support provided and fee refund. A lecture was taken over by students changing names on call, undermines democratic conversations.

CO-CLES also agrees. Some students are happy with the efforts some lecturers are putting in (doing extra work for the students). There are positives of online learning. But not every lecturer is like this. Overwhelming consensus in the college is dissatisfaction. In psychology there are assignments coming back without proper feedback (despite given extra time for marking). The argument of 'protecting the integrity of the degree' does not stand if they are not helping progression.

The Guild President said that this is really complex (more [information](#)) – home/international students, undergraduate/postgraduate fees. What does a refund look like for different types of students? For international students, it is money direct from university to students (they paid and did not get what they paid for). For UK home students, with the fee system we want some kind of compensation – looks different for different students (money from the Government based on loans comes in next year). Financial package? Loan forgiveness? Students are going into a very hostile job market (especially masters students who have to start paying back immediately).

The Guild President continued – Vice-Chancellor expressed desire not to give a no detriment policy as that would admit students have been impacted this year, that what was delivered was not up to scratch and would come under consumer law. Agree with CO-SSIS that the University has lacked empathy – the idea that 'we've spent lots of money' that students would be happy. We are not saying that money has not been spent or people have not worked hard, but that there are reasons beyond the institution. If Council votes in this today, recommend a working group (involving students) in how to apply the stance in a non-blanket way.

VP Education agree with a working group. It could be valuable to link up with national campaigns (NUS, Students United Against Fees) and might be more efficient than Exeter working alone.

CO-Hums added that there are department staff which are working really hard to make up, and this is appreciated. But there are also staff using staff as an excuse to not deliver (including poor feedback on assignments). Students are not happy, some are empathetic. Most students are asking for some (not all) reimbursement. Grade disparity often unacceptable.

CO-SSIS has had essays with annotated feedback for the first time but not always clear. Some (home students) are sympathetic but international who are paying upfront not happy.

VP Activities - WonkHE Pearson survey said students want more opportunities to prove they are learning. Took to Student Experience Advisory Board and Education Executive (ADEs committed to take to staff to implement some changes). Many students have raised this as a priority.

CO-CLES added the Subject Chair catch-up some said they thought refunds would be unfair, so it is not everyone. Languages have had a good experience. VP Education this is understandable, but hard to gauge if reflective of all students-would be unnecessary to hold a referendum. There will always be some who disagree. Need to vote in the interest of most effected not most privileged. CO-Hums the majority want some sort of reimbursement. The Languages department were prepared. CO-SSIS said that the IIAS has also been doing extra work, but central University lacking.

The SGC said that Council needs to determine if this is the right time, mid-way through the academic year, to take stance. And it needs to determine if it has sufficient insight to take a stance.

Co-Hums Council has enough insight (have received a lot of feedback) and could have discussed this sooner – and need to consider PG students' courses last longer.

CO-CLES added that teaching has never been the full extent of learning and the education experience. Last year, when transitioned online were grateful for the provision. Start of this year, blended learning was welcomed – but this did not happen (labs, experiments, etc. Not happened) - it is not what was promised and is not sufficient. CO-SSIS agrees that the University has changed its message – and recognise courses are affected differently. CO-Hums many final-year students need archives for research and have been told to change their topic. Intra-library loans system not understood. CO-CLES added that fieldwork has been cancelled – student chose modules based on that fieldwork. VP Education said some grievances could be directed at departments or college.

CO-CMH asked what the next steps would be. VP Education said would likely involve joining existing campaigns.

CO-Hums presented the motion drafted by SGC and SVM. The Guild President requested the motion use 'compensation' rather than 'refund' to address the different types of students, for example load forgiveness. This will stand up to scrutiny from university leaders.

Council voted on the wording of the motion 'Guild Council believes that students have not received value for money this academic year so far and are therefore due compensation. Guild Council requests that the Guild establish a working group to determine a campaign which addresses different types of tuition fee arrangements.':

YES: 7
NO: 0
ABSTAIN: 0

The wording of the motion was therefore agreed.

CO-CMH expressed their intention to abstain as the majority of clinical courses still have placements, while agrees with the notion but not reflective of CMH.

Council voted on whether to adopt the motion as a stance:

YES: 6
NO: 0
ABSTAIN: 1

The motion was therefore passed and has been adopted as a stance.

ACTION: VP Education is to establish the working group. Others will be welcome to join.

4. Any other business.

None.

The meeting ended at 16:05.