**Emergency Student Council – Minutes 19.02.21, 3pm – 4.30pm**

Held via Zoom, 51 members in attendance

1. **Welcome**

Chair welcomes members to the meeting, notes that this is a safe space and to be respectful of each others opinions

1. **Purpose of Emergency Meeting**

Chair explains at the last Council the Student Strike policy passed however the Union constitution prevented Council from being able to refer the policy to referendum. This was resolved and this meeting has been called to re-debate the Strike Policy, this will be the only discussion point for this meeting.

1. **Policy debate (Paper 2)**
	1. Student Strike by Luke Humberstone
	*Calls the Union to ballot students for a student strike due to repeated rejections of student petitions and calls for action.*

Chair noes the Proposer isn’t in attendance and asks for a member to speak for the policy.

Member notes Luke Humberstone submitted the policy but can’t be at the meeting today, explains the policy was submitted because they believe the University hasn’t listened to any of the concerns raised by students, this includes lack of meaningful no detriment policy, not scrapping grad fees and not removing the John Witherspoon statue among other things. We have discussed these issues with Lucy Meredith at these meetings, pleading that we needed help and nothing has changed.

Adds this policy is to mandate the Union to hold a referendum on holding a Student Strike. Member notes that this may include asking students to refrain from engaging with their academic work, for example not attend lectures or go online, may have a socially distant protest, not submitting assessments etc.

Union President informs members that there are risks to the policy being passed, we don’t want students to have to wait to graduate or get lower grades for late submission and grades may be capped. Reminds members that Reps represent their Course so if they don’t like the policy you don’t have to vote for it.

Member reiterates the policy is for a referendum to be called to have a Strike not that students are going to strike. We wouldn’t want to make this decision and it should be open to all students to decide for themselves. Students have been struggling and nothing has changed, we can either just accept it or we can act and hold the referendum, just by passing the policy and holding the referendum will show the University students are serious.

Member notes international students have raised concerns about visas and how it might impact on bursary payments for Nursing and Social Work students. However, if we don’t vote for it, the University might think it’s not that important, we don’t necessarily need to go on Strike but this could be enough to get the University to listen.

Member notes Reps are very well informed about what’s happening to students and how isolated students are feeling, unless we are actively reaching out we don’t hear individual struggles. As a MSc student, when this was raised with my cohort, they had a lot of concerns and fears and we held a drop in session to explain the reasons why this was being discussed. The cohort are happy with their experience, some international students may not have had the support they should have but the majority of students are happy with the course. If this is a kick back to the University we have a responsibility to hear stories, as an alternative could we reach out to students to get case studies and explain what’s happening to individual students.

Member notes that the Strike will have a different impact on different students, the Strike action is not mandatory, students don’t need to actually strike but the Union will act on it. There are lots of students who are doing fine, some like the flexibility but means there’s even more of a problem and shows the disparity between groups of students, marginalised students, working class students are all struggling with studying, paying bills etc.

The Head of Student Support Services provides clarification, explains that if the policy passes, it changes the Unions stance to ‘Pro Strike’. The Union will support a referendum on Strike action and we would produce impartial neutral guidance for the ‘Yes/For’ campaign and for the ‘No/Against’ campaign. Arguments will be based on fact and evidence and at this point there would be more information available about what the strike would involve.

Member explains that assessment grades are starting to be returned but student are complaining that it’s taking too long to give feedback on submissions, some of it is external constraints and not the lecturers fault.

Member notes that students are being bound by a deadline but lecturer aren’t, we are being penalised for submitting as part of an extension but lecturers can hand back grades whenever they like, even though there is a 3 week turnaround.

Members ask what we would gain from the strike, what are we asking the University to do.

Member responds that we’d be asking for a firm ‘no detriment’ policy, degree algorithms to be reverted back to last year and additional support.

Member notes that a number of students in their cohort have asked for extensions but they’ve been ignored and they ignore the fact that students have had support removed because of the situation, some don’t have scribes or other non medical support. Students are dropping out because they can’t cope, students who’ve had covid have been ignored, we handed assessment in during January and have been told they won’t be returned until March.

Member notes students in their cohort have been forced to leave the course because they can’t pay the fees because they don’t have jobs, they’ve tried to negotiate but have been refused.

Member explains that if we hold a referendum the information will be circulated to students, the engagement in this has increased already. Adds that teaching staff are really struggling as well, they were striking last year and we should work with them on this. They are victims of the University’s incompetence too.

Member reiterates that the policy gives all students the chance to have their voices heard and they may change their minds once information is shared.

Member explains they studied at Stirling University, lectures there held Strikes but so did students and it does have a big impact. Adds that we shouldn’t say students can’t have a referendum to Strike, that they don’t have a choice, they don’t have to take part. Students need the chance to vote on it, they might say no.

Member notes they are uncomfortable at the scare tactics being used to approach the Strike, we should be diplomatic and using this to appeal to them rather than scare them. How does that reflect the student body through scaring the University. It’s not to say we can’t take action, just do it more diplomatically

Member notes it can be seen as scare tactics, nothing else seems to be working, we aren’t being listened too. Adds the point is to get the University to act and get media attention which they don’t want, we have the moral high ground the University haven’t supported us. We have to vote for this policy and allow all students to have their voice heard and make the University listen.

Chair invites any new points to be raised, there are none.

Chair moves to vote, noting the policy requires a minimum of 26 votes For to pass

For: 38

Against: 9

Abstain: 4

Chair notes the policy has passed and the Union will begin planning for the referendum.

Head of Student Support Services notes there will be a call out for students to form campaign teams for each side of the debate and equal resources will be provided. Members will be kept updated as this progresses.

Chair thanks members for their contributions and debate and closes the meeting. Invites members to stay on the call for a chat if they’d like.