**27/03/24 Student Council Minutes**

13:30 – 15:30 (5-minute break at 14:30)

Location: Teams

Total in attendance: 43

Guest: Rachel Cragg Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning Teaching & Student Success)

Sabbatical Officers: Vice President Education

Chair: Sabina Lawrie

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| **1** | **Welcome***Union Chair and SR&PC will welcome attendees and explain the council meeting.* |
| 1.1 | **Student Rep Society** |
| **2** | **Senior Manager Question Time**Our guest will be Rachel Cragg Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning Teaching & Student Success) |
| **3** | **Sabbatical Officer Question Time** |
| **4** | **Vote for a New Union Chair** |
| **5** | **Review of Previous Minutes** |
| **6** | **Policy Debates** |
| 6.1 | Student Rep Support |

***Close***

# 1. Welcome

Our Union Chair, Rui, is not available and sends her apologies, so Sabina will chair today’s Student Council meeting. Sabina uses she/her pronouns.

Today we are going to elect a new Union Chair. The Union chair holds meetings and is also responsible for holding the Student Presidents to account. In the past we’ve had Jeremy Paxman style interviews with the presidents. Whoever gets the role will receive chair training from Liz Marshall, as well as receiving support from Sabina. There is a lot of space to make the role your own. Are there any questions?

## 1.1 Student Rep Society

My name is Gemma Murrell and I’m the president of the Student Rep Society. The Student Rep Society was created for student reps to support other reps but also has benefits for incoming students and will be available on every campus. There are drop-in sessions for students to resolve many issues and if students don’t know who their rep is, they’re welcome to come to us. We are organising a selection of internal and external speakers as well as training.

I have attended offer holder sessions to raise awareness of these services and there is also have a handbook explaining more about their society. Feel free to message either myself or the vice president Brian Boyd if you have any questions or would like some more information.

President of URS Gemma Murrell - B00871623@studentmail.uws.ac.uk

Vice President of URS Brian Boyd – B00491279@studentmail.uws.ac.uk

# 2. Senior Management Question Time

Hello to everyone, I’m Rachel Cragg, Pro Vice-Chancellor and I’ve been here for two and a half months now. I think I’m very fortunate to be working at this university – my first impression is what an amazing University with great facilities for students. I’ll just say some things about my role and ask questions.

I report directly to James Miller – James is my boss. I’m a member of the University’s executive team so we have strategic responsibility and work with teams to make sure we can develop it. I’m also in the sector for student success, which involves talking to academics making sure they have confidence and skills they need. As a university, we have to demonstrate that our courses are of a certain academic standard - Alison’s team makes sure our programmes meet these standards. Student complaints are also escalated to me on occasion.

In terms of student success, how do we make sure your marks are recorded properly, ready for graduation, that takes place within the registry team. Also how do we help students to progress, if something is going wrong at home hwo can we support you.

My role also has a strong link to the schools – each school can do things quite differently which is sometimes the right thing to do in their circumstances, but on other occasions they are just not following processes. Central services can hold them to account.

Why does this matter to me? I’ve come to a university like this one because I recognise that we put students first – the reason I get out of bed is because I know there is a group of people who are relying on us to progress in their future. Most people go to university once and it’s a great opportunity to engage in new things, broaden your horizons and meet with new people.

I gave myself 100 days to try and understand the university. I’m interested in your questions, but also can you influence me in deciding what my priorities should be. If you were selling our university to the next group of students, what would you say and what would you say to your friends in the pub about whats not working? Because im quite new still, I’m very happy to come back to council again in the future to keep the conversation going when I have more info.

**Questions:**

Q: Would you be able to offer some clarity on if your role is within the same remit as the schools’ Learning and Teaching?

A: Within each school there is the Dean and a new role coming to every school of Associate Dean Learning and Teaching, who reports to the Dean. I’m accountable for academic quality across the University, whereas the Dean is accountable for their school. The Learning and Teaching Deans meet with me once a month to check that they’re working to the University remit that I’m setting as Pro Vice-Chancellor.

Q: How do the guidelines for different schools work?

A: The University sets guidelines and sometimes it’s a firm “you must” and other times its more like “you could” guidance. I have a point about consistency and am concerned there may be an issue if things haven’t gone the same way in each school and stdunets from different school are being told different information. We need to give the schools tools to be appropriate for their discipline area but also let students know why this is.

Q: I talk to incoming students at offer holder sessions and the main thing I tell them is that the number of opportunities they have to make change within the university is amazing.

A: How do we ensure that the student voice really is within the university? There is not as much of a student voice here than I have experienced at other universities.

Q: I think that’s what we’re building the Student Rep Society for, as there is a lack of engagement – those who want to bring up any issues can come here, the people in the Rep Society would be the first to say that student reps are the representation of the university.

A: Is the Rep Society representative of all students?

Q: We’re working on it.

Q: I have two things to mention – firstly that when you go to work you will not get to be with your best friends every day, so I think that working with lots of different students for groupwork projects is important. My second point is regarding inclusivity: I found that the disability action plan and services seem to be of a “one size fits all” model – for example, all disabled students get fifty percent extra time when some don’t always need it. I feel it would be better if it was more individualised because all disabilities are different.

A: I will have a look at the guidance for groupwork that is letting the same groups meet again and again, I’ll check that, but I agree with you. Regarding the issue around inclusivity – I don’t know what our policies look like but thank you for the feedback and I’ll get back to you once I’ve fully investigated it.

Q: I’d like to bring up an issue with university life and belonging: When I was taking part in the sabbatical officer elections I visited Lanarkshire campus. There are major issues with the transport – even when I was told where to go, I had no idea how to get there. There is a real disconnect between the Lanarkshire and Paisley campuses, which is a huge issue.

A: I was aware that there are challenges - the issue about community is important, we need to be thinking about how we can build a sense of belonging and hold more events to make Lanarkshire a place where people want to be on campus instead of making people want to leave.

Q: I’d just like to touch on what was said earlier regarding groupwork – for me being a first-year undergraduate, I did a lot of groupwork, and my groups mostly consisted of just my friends, so I wasn’t able to talk to new people. Perhaps it would be better if our lecturers were to put us into groups so that we could learn more about other people and speak to more of our classmates?

A: I think that’s really helpful. Maybe we can look at this as a sense of belong piece, and how we enable people to find new friends. We could use groupwork as a way to meet new people. If you take part in groupwork on your course, you will either be the best member of your team, the worst, or somewhere in the middle, however, if you start a new job where you are the only person doing your role then you are guaranteed to be the expert in your field. So how do we help students get experience of being the expert and being leaders?

Chair: Thank you very much for coming Rachel, our members really appreciate this part of the meeting find it valuable, we’ll definitely be inviting you back in the future.

# 3. Sabbatical Officer Question Time

## Union President: Uchechi Agbaraji

Uchechi was not able to make it to this meeting and sent her apologies.

## Vice President Education: Subuola Elufioye

My manifesto is all done. Academic skills and the library are doing one-to-one sessions, so if you have any questions about research or assignments you can go there for an appointment.

Student success rate: If you have any questions about exceptional progression please reach out, the university is working on that too. If you’ve been contacted and don’t understand the email, reach out to us.

Career development: I’m expecting the University to take charge of this and give us funding, we need them to go to other universities and see how it works. The hiccup is we don’t know how to launch it.

Accessible education: Lanarkshire is the major concern here because of the bus issues. We’d encourage people to hold a petition to continue to protest for better travel to the Lanarkshire campus.

I’m on a committee called the Academic Equality Committee where we have flagged that an extenuating circumstances submission (ECS) is not very easy to understand, and the wording can be confusing for students. We also said that they need to give more time to complete the submission, as 48 hours is not always enough for some students. They’re now working on changing the wording and making it simpler. If you have any challenges that you or your colleagues have faced submitting an ECS, or if you have any ideas about how to make the ECS process better and more student friendly, please get in touch. We’ll bring all feedback back to council.

Thank you for listening to my final Ted Talk and thanks for having me as your Vice President Education! Mic drop. 🎤

**Questions and Comments for Subuola:**

Q: I used an extenuating circumstances submission (ECS) not long ago. There are two sections to it and it’s hard to understand which one is the actual assessment report.

A: Thank you - I can include that as part of the report.

Q: This is my perspective as a first-year student – I’m seeing younger people come into new environments, and they struggle not necessarily because they lack ability but because new environments are stressful. The ECS process should understand that having to do something new while under pressure can lead to burnout. It would be good if ECS could make mental health a priority.

Q: This is my first meeting as a first-year student nurse. I have to fill one in because I missed almost all of my last placement. I had been told that it was easy to fill in, but when it comes to a 16-week block of placement, it was a minefield. From what I’ve seen so far it looks like its geared towards academic assessments rather than placements. In my case, I missed 215 hours of placement, but theres no space to specify that.

Q: I understand there are things that halt people doing assignments - in my year I’ve known several people who just submit an ECS because they procrastinate and can’t be bothered handing in their assignment on time. There was a student who hasn’t ever submitted an assessment on time, using an ECS every single time. I don’t find that fair for the people who stress to hand in assignments on time. Is there anything we can do to monitor that?

A: ECS is for students and was designed and put in place by the Students Union to help them through their assessments. What students choose to use the ECS for is only their business. Ultimately its not taking away anything from anyone else. The only thing we don’t tolerate is misinformation.

Q: I’ve never had to do an ECS for my whole degree but now have been working as a nurse and have had no choice but to use it as a protection. Because this is my first time applying, I’ve received an email confirming that I’ve applied, but I’ve not received confirmation that it is approved.

A: Thanks for flagging that – the submission should be approval. Some students said they submitted it but then spoke to their lecturers and they said it hadn’t been approved. If you have this issue you could get in touch with the advice team. Also, please feedback to us on how you found the process.

## Vice President Student Development: Ovoke Adams Adamatie

Voke was not able to make it to this meeting and sent his apologies.

# 4. Vote for a New Union Chair

There were 4 candidates for the new Union Chair, including Reopen Nominations.

**Candidate Speeches:**

Fatematul Zannat: I am a class rep in Business and Creative Studies (BCS) and would like to challenge myself to try something new.

Michael Docherty: I’ve been a rep for two years and have always been at council meetings. Having this role would be an advantage for future opportunities and would let me try something new.

Gemma Murrell: I’m involved in lots of working groups, and I’ve got lots of experience in meetings and with the rep society. This would be a great way for me to meet new people and help others.

Gemma Murrell was voted as the new Union Chair for 2024-2025.

# 5. Review of Previous Minutes

There were no issues and the minutes have been approved.

# 6. Policy Debates

When you attend rep training youre invited to attensd sparqs q – they indroduce leadership role for student reps, it would be a good idea for them to add info about student rep – more about making sure it is signposted all over university and it’s well-known.

6.1 Student Rep Support:

This policy was passed with 88% of the vote.

# Meeting Close

Thank you all so much for your participation in Student Council this year. We staff don’t know what it’s like to be a student today, but you do, so we need you to tell us so that we can help to improve the student experience at UWS.

*End of Meeting.*