**Student Council Minutes – 20.01.21, 13:30 – 15:30
Held via Zoom, 89 members in attendance.**

The meeting was Chaired by the Vice President Education, Aishwarya Tiku.

1. **Welcome**

Chair welcomes members and introduces herself. Notes with members that the Union Chair, David Laffen, is unable to attend due to an assessment and we wish him luck with that.

Encourages members to introduce themselves if speaking, including using pronouns. Acknowledges with members that this is a busy time and thanks everyone for attending. Also wishes everyone at UWS and a happier and safer 2021.

1. **Senior Management Question Time – Lucy Meredith, Deputy Vice Chancellor**

Chair welcomes Lucy Meredith to the meeting and encourages members to ask questions or type these in the chat box. Notes that any questions we don’t have time for will be passed to Lucy (and Jonathan Powles) following the meeting.

Provost and Deputy Vice Chancellor, Lucy Meredith, thanks members for inviting her along again and is pleased to be here. Notes with members Jonathan Powles, Vice Principal of Learning, Teaching and Students is unwell and sends his apologies. Adds that any questions will be forwarded to him.

Lucy notes that the Covid response has continued to be very challenging and UWS is continuing to respond at short notice to guidance from the Scottish and UK Governments in managing the situation. We are awaiting final information in regard to Higher Education and this will be updated on the FAQ section for Students on the UWS website as well as communicated directly via email. Currently, teaching and learning is a hybrid module with the vast majority of engagement is online, the only campus activity is skills and lab sessions which must be done in person before placements etc.

Lucy provides an update on support for students noting Senate approval is required however Part Time Honours students who are completing this year will do so under the emergency regulations. Adds that at the start of the year we adjusted modules to a hybrid environment including assessments with no on campus exams and have taken them out where possible, however Professional Body requirements must stay as they are. Explains to members she doesn’t believe we need many unseen exams, feels these are unfair and not reflective of ability, we will be looking at this more going forward. Also adds that extensions to assessment submissions can go up to 14 days from original submission date and Extenuating Circumstances still apply. We will also look at modules where credit needs to be completed from one year to the next, we will be allowing a 20 credit points deficit where this is possible (again due to Professional Body requirements). Adds that assessment and module review processes will be enhanced this year, looking for outlying modules and if there is underperformance, a vigorous process will be used to improve it before next year.

Lucy further notes with members, she and Jonathan meet with the Sabbatical Officers regularly, usually twice per week and this will continue with next years Sabbs too. We try our best to respond to all issues raised by students and we appreciated their thoughts and questions.

Lucy also informs members the Student Accommodation rebate discussions are taking place, appreciates that everyone’s situation is different and notes that UWS have built in flexibility for payment and staying in accommodation, encourages students worried about anything to contact Accommodation Services.

Lucy states that a year ago, we were thinking about what the student experience will look like for the 2025 strategic plan, the Student Experience Programme as part of this looks at ambitions for teaching by 2025. For example are we teaching the right things, is the curriculum fit for purpose, what isn’t working and what do we stop doing. The hybrid model was achieved quickly with lots of feedback from students and what students have liked is flexibility and accessibility, therefore are there things students can do from home or do they need to be in the same space. We’re also looking at how we assess students, students should see the value in assessment rather than it being a chore. The Student Experience Programme will start in next couple of weeks and students will be represented by the Sabbatical Offices with other students being involved by invitation.

Lucy also notes with members that she is the strategic lead for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and is working with colleagues on what that looks like including committees and working groups. Adds that she understands and agrees with students’ feelings on decolonisation of the University and there are colleagues working with Advance HE on decolonising the curriculum among other things. Once we have guidance from this group, we can work on this. Alongside this we’ll look at the University itself, including statues, pictures, and the naming of buildings.

Chair thanks Lucy for updating members and opens questions from members, reminds members they can indicate in the chat box if they would like to ask a question or they can type the question in the chat box. Also notes any questions we don’t get to will be passed on.

Q: Member notes with Lucy that last year 40 credits were able to be carried over, why has this been reduced to 20 credits?

A: Lucy responds that we are looking at modules which are essential for progression. If anyone is unsure of what is required they should contact their Programme Leader. For example, if a student didn’t complete a skills session which stopped them from progressing, but they’ve completed all other parts, this would be allowed. Equally, too much credit is also a challenge for completing in that year, we don’t want to set students up to fail. Notes that Programme Leaders are asked to consider what the implications are of this for students on their programme as it will be different for different programmes, it won’t however impact on honours grading.

Q: Member states that seminar classes are not working very well due to class size and time constraints, can the classes be reduced or time increased?

A: Lucy states that this seems quite specific and asks for more details be provided to enquire further.

Q: Member explains that before Covid we already had a huge mental health crisis, students are stressed with exams, poor study environments, jobs, children, money. We are grateful for measures so far but some students are considering dropping out despite the support. How will UWS tackle this at its route and ensure no student is left behind?

A: Lucy thanks member for their question, agrees with the points made, we are looking at this from all aspects and will continue to support student facing services including Student Services and Union who play a key role. We want everyone to succeed, we want all our students to graduate and have a great career, we know times are uncertain and we need to continue to support each other, ensuring resources go where they are needed most. We are always asking what the impact is on the student experience and taking measures to support everyone as best as possible.

Q: Member asks why there is no payment plan for tuition fees as students are being removed for tuition fees.

A: Lucy responds that this may be an individual case and notes that she has challenged finance over the last year however it’s important to engage with the staff who are in touch with them. Adds that she can pick this up privately and to send over further details.

Q: Member states that several of her classmates, including her, haven’t been able to return to UWS student accommodation because of the new lockdown restrictions. Adds that students appreciate the lease freezes in place for T2 however enquired about possible refunds for rent paid in January and was informed by the Residence Team that they have been advised that January payments would remain unchanged. Students feel this is unfair and asks what the reasoning behind this decision is and why there is no rent refunds or partial refunds being made available.

A: Lucy asks for more details on this, notes that there could be unintended consequences of decisions and will get back to them.

Q: Member acknowledges the Uni are waiting for government guidelines, asks however if there will be any face to face classes in Term 2? Some students need to know if they should return to Scotland for classes or stay where they are.

A: Lucy responds that the restrictions are up to 18th February and only mission critical students are on campus currently, this isn’t helpful for lab sessions we understand, but we’re waiting for the guidance. Adds that if we can move back to on campus activity, we will do as term 1 with schedule classes socially distanced. Adds that we must meet the learning outcomes and some classes may need to be pushed back further. Notes that everything is discussed as part of the Critical Incident Team and discussed with Schools, including how it impacts on students and communication will be sent as soon as possible.

Q: Member asks if the May exams will be cancelled and assignment based only?

A: Lucy responds that we asked academics to ensure, where appropriate, alternatives to exams were set ensuring these met learning outcomes and professional body requirements, the number of exams have reduced massively and where there is an exam it’s because it is the best way to assess or is required by professional bodies. Adds that she feels this is a good opportunity to discuss and consider with professional bodies changes to their accrediting conditions, Universities do need to lobby the bodies to introduce changes but they do make the rules and are experts in their fields.

Q: Member states they have been inundated with emails from students thinking about dropping out, they are concerned about childcare, some are keyworkers and carers, many are struggling financially. Asks if there is any extra support will be provided?

A: Lucy responds that for Individual circumstances Extenuating Circumstance is available, adds that it’s important for students to reach out and discuss their own situation with Student Services.

Q: Member states that with everyone struggling at home, the Criminal Justice programme doesn’t have their timetable yet, for some students this is a major problem for work shifts, childcare etc. and we don’t know what day we’ll be in to make arrangements.

A: Lucy notes with members that timetabling is within Jonathan Powles portfolio but will come back to students. Adds that she is not entirely happy with how timetabling works generally and the upcoming Student Experience Programme includes looking at timetabling. Students should be able to know what their timetable would like in duly during the application process so they can make informed decisions about whether University is for them, if they’ll have time or can fit it around their life more generally to help them succeed.

Q: Member states it is unfair that UWS is not amending the Honours Classification algorithm for this year, although Extenuating Circumstances is available, if the Covid situation continues as it is, students will still feel they cannot do their best work. There is a petition signed by 1200 students, why are UWS not reconsidering this?

A: Lucy notes that last year the algorithm was changed in response to an emergency situation very quickly. Over the summer and through this year we have worked closely with colleagues on the hybrid model. When results are presented to Exam Boards we will check for consistency from previous years, particularly final years students, results should be reflective of students ability. Adds that going forward we will be looking at how we calculate the degrees, including performance in 3rd and 4th year as part of Student Experience Programme. Also notes that we have to let students know in advance how their degree is awarded, unless there are emergency situations like Covid.

Member adds comment that they feel the response is not in the best interest of this years 4th years and is not reflective of what is actually happening. For my course we had our dissertation proposals marked and then we had to change them and this new work doesn’t consolidate learning in the labs because we can’t access the labs. This isn’t being taken into consideration, this is our final year and some haven’t been able to achieve their best and show what their ability is. Feels strongly and knows others do too, that it isn’t fair that we are being penalised because the pandemic is ongoing, the pandemic hasn’t stopped but we are all still expected to carry on as if nothing is different.

A: Lucy responds that we will look at the performance of modules, we also have External Examiners who look at the grades and module performance. Adds that she does understand how students are feeling and will personally ensure this is looked at.

1. **Review of previous minutes (Paper 1)**

Review of minutes – no comments – Minutes approved.

1. **Sabbatical Officer Reports (Paper 2)**

Chair notes that the President is on Annual Leave currently. Encourages members to post questions to the Sabbatical Officers in the chat box or email them.

* 1. **President – Late Paper**

Chair notes these are taken as read and questions should be posted in the chat box.

* 1. **Vice President Education – Late Paper**

VPE, Aishwarya Tiku, notes she’s received lots of emails about library resources and online materials and notes that the Library have new subscriptions for databases which were requested, encourages members to reach out to the Library Team for support and they are happy to help. Also working on deadline clashes and assessments. Welcomes all comments and feedback to meetings we are attend. Get in touch if you’d like to be involved in anything or ask any questions.

* 1. **Vice President Student Development – Late Paper**

Chair notes these are taken as read and questions should be posted in the chat box.

* 1. **Vice President Welfare & Wellbeing**

VPWW, Luke Humerstone, states that work he is undertaking not included in the report is rent rebates and lease freezes and encourages members to get in touch if they want to discuss this more. Adds that NUS Scotland are working on a ‘Students Deserve Better’ campaign which includes sending emails to MSP’s asking them to support the campaign and increase funding for digital poverty. Also notes that in the report there are lots of opportunities for students to get involved including reducing dissertation stress, eliminating deadline clashes, better timetabling and mental health and lived experience, encourages members to get in touch. Also adds that there is a Mental Health Learner survey, launching later this year and encourages everyone to fill it in and we will promote it.

1. **Policy debate (Paper 3)**

Chair invites the Student Representation and Policy Co-ordinator, Sabina Lawrie, to outline how policy works, notes that any student can propose policy which can be up or down voted and commented on via the Union website, however only reps can pass or reject the policy. All policy proposals are available on the Union website here: <https://www.uwsunion.org.uk/representation/sauwsstudentsvoice/>

Policy proposed is discussed in order of popularity and will stay on the website for 2 cycles of Council before they are taken off entirely. We will use the Poll function on Zoom for voting and all policies require a simple majority to pass (50% +1), for this meeting policy requires 39 members to vote in favour for it to pass.

* 1. **Changing Places - Accessible Bathrooms by Sarah Anderson**

*Campaign for an accessible bathroom on all campuses to include an adult changing table, shower set, tracking hoist system, washbasin, privacy curtain in a 3mx4m room with minimum height of 2.4m*

Members request for this policy to go straight to vote, there are no objections

Chair moves to vote

For: 70 - passed

* 1. **Accessible Resources by Sarah Anderson***For the Union to petition to ensure that required reading lists are available in electronic form*

Members request for this policy to go straight to vote, there are no objections

Chair moves to vote

For: 70 - passed

* 1. **Hybrid Council - Making democracy accessible by Sarah Anderson**

*To host student council and other meetings as hybrid in-person and online*

*NOTE: Policies stand for five years and may be implemented in times after the COVID-19 pandemic*

Members request to speak, Chair opens floor for questions and comments.

Proposer notes the hybrid Council will be useful in ‘normal’ times, it can help with commuting, childcare, jobs etc. Encourages members to vote for the policy

Question by member – Would voting be at the same time online and offline? Proposer notes yes, there are systems to aid this.

Chair moves to vote

For: 70 - passed

Policy clarification by Student Support Manager – Notes with members the Union is not considering returning to physical Council meetings up to the end of the current strategic plan. We will discuss it further however due to the policy being passed.

* 1. **Supporting Student Tenants During COVID-19 by Ellie Gomersall***For the Union to monitor the treatment of students in UWS accommodation, and lobby for UWS to refund rent for any period students were advised not to return, allowing early termination of contracts, and adhere to eviction ban rules.*

Proposer notes policy was submitted before recent communication regarding rent rebates. Adds however the policy is still relevant as some students are still being charged, the policy also aimed to ensure the University follow the Scottish Government eviction ban.

Chair moves to vote

For: 66 - passed

* 1. **Student Card Availability by Kimberleyann Boyce**

*For students to have physical cards*

*Point of order: School of Health and Life Sciences are posting out student IDs*

Proposer notes students were told at start of year they wouldn’t get physical cards, but as a nursing student we need these. There is a thought that the University may stick to digital ID cards in the future (post-Covid) however can we ensure physical cards are available for those who need them.

Chair moves to vote

For: 59 - passed

* 1. **Teaching proposal - Camera on during video lecturers by Anonymous**

*For lecturers to record themselves during lectures as well as the presentation*

*Point of order: Lectures to be recorded is recommended, but whether or not video is used is up to the lecturer.*

Proposer asks for lecturers to use their video when recording.

Member responds that the policy is problematic as not all modules or lectures would be recoded well. For example in Law, we can cover emotive or controversial issues and there is a risk that students would be inhibited from contributing if they are recorded. Concern also that the video lectures would be re-used rather than having a lecturer.

Members agree with this point and note further that lecturers can give advice/hints for assignments, is it possible for the wording to be amended to say if it’s possible to record? Members also note we need to allow the lecturers to teach in the best way they can and this should be encouraged but not mandatory

Member also states that under the Equality Act, Reasonable Adjustments need to be made for students with access needs, if students have lip reading needs, the equality act would cover this for the individual.

Chair thanks members for their discussion and moves to vote

For: 25 - rejected

* 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.*

Proposer states they recognise the strength of feeling for not having a ‘no detriment’ policy, we have worked hard to share this with the University and we haven’t gotten very far. Notes we now need to escalate the action and call for a referendum on a Student Strike, this referendum would take place during the upcoming student elections. If we go on strike, we would ask students to refrain from engaging with their academic work for example not attend lectures or go online, may have a socially distinct protest, not submitting assessments etc. This is an extreme measure but we aren’t’ being listened to. For clarity, if the policy is passed it will trigger a referendum to ask students to decide if they want to go on a strike, passing the policy doesn’t mean we definitely will go on strike.

Question by member - If this passes and there is a strike, if we don’t engagement how would that look at the end of the year? Proposer responds that it is a risk, however if we pass it and have a referendum it will give us more strength when negotiating things with senior management of UWS.

Question by member – There is also a risk that students would go on strike but submit and engage anyway. Proposer responds this is true.

Member states they think it’s a reasonable thing but worry about putting students in the position of not completing their course or moving to the next year of study. Proposer responds that to start with it would be a single day of action and we would use it as a next steps activity.

Members state it’s a great idea but international student visa has engagement attached to it so some students may not be able to support this at all. Proposer responds that we can look at other ways to get students involved.

Member notes that this type of action has worked in other places, for example in University of Manchester for student tenant issues, students held a rent strike and it achieved national attention, it gave them the power to negotiate better, it may work here.

Point of clarity by the Student Support Manager – notes with members that a referendum is a University wide ballot of all students (approx. 15000), for it to be valid 3% of students need to vote, once achieved it’s a simple majority of who wins (50% + 1). The Union will produce unbiased information/guidance and the Deputy Returning Officers will decide the questions. If passed it would be put forward as part of our Elections.

Chair thanks members for their discussion and moves to vote

For: 46 - passed

* 1. **Captions on social media posts for people with visual impairments by Hannah Eaton***For social media posts from societies and the students union to include image captions and for hashtags to have each word capitalised.*

Proposer notes this was submitted as it’s important that images are explained for students with visual impairments and screen readers aren’t able to recognise writing on pictures, giving a description of the picture enables those with visual impairment to interact and engage with the Union and Societies, making them accessible to all students

Member notes the Equality Act applies here and should be passed.

Chair moves to vote

For: 64 - passed

* 1. **A Helpline On Student cards (POLICY LAPSE)**

*For the Union to negotiate if they can become part of the nightline scheme and lobby the University to put a helpline number on the back of student ID cards*

Chair notes this is a Policy Lapse and asks if anyone would like to speak for the policy.

Member notes having an emergency contact and finding a partner organisation to help our students is important. Member explains that having something like this could help many students including themselves, particularly at such a difficult and challenging time.

Members ask if this can be extended on to the digital cards.

Point of Clarity by the Student Representation and Policy Co-ordinator – notes that all Policies passed lapse after 5 years, Council decide whether to keep it or reject it.

Chair moves to vote

For: 64 - passed

* 1. **Making all our policies more accessible – Ellie Gomersall***All active Union policies should be available on a dedicated page and an up-to-date copy of the policy action log must be available and updated 2 weeks prior to a student council meeting.*

Proposer notes that all Council policies and any other relevant information for students is online for everyone to see, however the Policy Document should also be updated regularly and at least 2 weeks prior to Council.

Chair moves to vote

For: 60 - passed

Chair closes policy debate due to time constraints and thanks members for contributing to the meeting. Notes that the link will be kept open if anyone would like to chat. Encourages members to get in touch with questions or comments and to engage with the Teams Rep groups.

Chair notes the next meeting of Council will be held on Wednesday 31st March at 1.30pm. Members are also reminded that the Annual General Meeting of the Union is being held on 29th January at 4pm (followed by a Social).