

Heriot-Watt University Student Union
Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 16 February 2021
Online, Zoom

In attendance

POLLY TO TAKE NOTE

Observers

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The meeting opened at 6.17PM

1. WELCOME AND QUORUM COUNT

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the AGM 2021. The Chair, Emily King (President) introduced herself to the meeting and introduced Lara Stroudinsky (VPW), Colin Aitken (VPC), Alex Hedlund (VPE) Jamie Nutter (Acting CEO) and Stephanie (Trustee) and Lok To (Student Trustee).
- 1.2. The Student President handed the Chair to Cameron Maxwell (Chair of Parliament).
- 1.3. The Chair informed the meeting that copies of the agenda were available online and explained that the rules attendees could use to influence how the meeting runs were on the agenda. If students needed any help with this process they were encouraged to direct message the Student Engagement Manager.
- 1.4. Opportunities to ask questions directly would be offered later in the meeting.
- 1.5. The Chair noted that because this meeting was being held in exceptional circumstances, the vote would be done by an online poll and invited questions or comments.
- 1.6. The Chair asked the Student Engagement Manager if there were enough students present for the meeting to be quorate.
- 1.7. With 51 students present the meeting was quorate.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 2.1. Copies of the previous Minutes are available online.
- 2.2. The indicative votes taken at the AGM of 2020 were passed by an online vote of students during elections.

3. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

- 3.1. A vote was taken to pass the Minutes as an accurate record. The majority voted to **pass** the Minutes.

4. NOTICE OF ADDITION OF Any Other Competent Business (AOCB)

- 4.1. The Chair opened the floor to AOCB. Members were asked to raise their hands should they have any request.
- 4.2. There were no notices of additions.

5. CHALLENGES TO THE ORDER PAPER

- 5.1 No changes were requested to the Order Paper.

6. RESIGNATIONS AND ELECTIONS

6.1. The Chair informed the meeting that there have been no resignations this year.

7. AFFILIATIONS TO EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 7.1. The Chair informed the meeting that part of our Articles require us to inform the AGM of the organisations we affiliate to.
- 7.2. The Chair informed the meeting The Student Union was currently affiliated to the National Union of Student (NUS) with an annual fee, last year, of £25,560, and a fee this year of £15,295. The Chair explained why we affiliate to NUS and the benefits we gain from doing so. The floor was opened to any questions from the meeting. No one raised their hands to speak.

8. DATES TO NOTE

- 8.1. Nominations for elections closed yesterday.
- 8.2. Voting will take place from 7pm, Monday 8th to 5pm, Thursday 11th March with results on 12th March 2021.

9. REPORTS

- 9.1. **Audited Accounts 2019-20:** The Chair informed the meeting that the Union has their annual accounts audited by external auditors. This is a requirement of the Student Union as a Charity under the rules of the charity governing body OSCR. A copy of the accounts was available online. The Chair asked the Student President to comment on the accounts.
- The Student President noted:
- A clean bill of health from the Auditors on an ongoing basis– no issues requiring disclosure.
 - Surplus on normal activities as a consequence of tight financial management & use of government support in the pandemic, Union had been performing as expected prior to this.
 - Things continue to be challenging but in managing our finances we continue to ensure support for our students forms part of the financial decision-making process.
- 9.2. The Chair asked the meeting if everyone was happy to accept these accounts as showing the correct management of the Student Union. The meeting voted as a majority to **accept** the accounts.
- 9.3. **Officer Reports:** The President and Vice Presidents gave a brief report on the work they had done this year
- 9.4. The Chair opened the floor for a Q & A Session.
- 9.5. **JAMES KILGOUR – What is the ongoing situation with dissertation extensions, and it is equal across the University**
- Alex Hedlund responded stating that SoSS took the decision for all students in that School. School Officers are working to get similar extensions for all Schools. The University will not make a university wide decision but are leaving it to individual Schools to decide.
- 9.6. **FRANKIE HULME – Have students raised concerns about cyber-crime / harassment?**
- Lara Stroudinsky explained it had been a potential concern raised by NUS, but there have been no reports from HW students.
- ELEANOR FITZPATRICK – Is discount for student fees being explored?**

Alex Hedlund has worked with the President to lobby the Scottish Government and University. FTOs signed a letter arranged by NUS Scotland to lobby the Scottish Government for increased support. It is work in progress.

LESLEY NICOL – How have students on campus reacted to current COVID situation?

Emily King explained there has been a lot of frustration from students, wanting to return to campus when they are able to. There are some students on campus due to wellbeing reasons or they have no other option. Students are feeling safe living on campus, and we are trying to provide as much activity for them to do where possible. For those living off campus, the Union has lobbied the university to keep spaces available on campus such as through increased library opening hours, and safe study spaces. Overall, the actions taken have been well received as students are understanding of the situation.

Alex Hedlund outlined that the Schools are working hard behind the scenes to plan for as many scenarios as they can under the current restrictions and what they may change to, in order to minimise the impact on students and their futures.

AMY FOSTER – How has performance of students changed as a result of online learning?

Alex Hedlund replied that it altered based upon course, linked to the assessment type that was most appropriate. The Academic Safety Net Policy ensures that no student is disadvantaged due to the current pandemic and Responsive Blended Learning. Alex Hedlund gave an explanation of the Safety Net Policy and how it operates. There is no feedback on a reduction in performance.

JAMES KILGOUR – What do the FTO's think of the University's view on plagiarism and how are they protecting students?

Emily King replied that FTOs sit on many University committees and see when cases are escalated. There has been a slight increase in plagiarism, and Contract Cheating is a concern. It has been raised with the University that cases of contract cheating are not always obvious to students who believe they are using legitimate services. It is not Emily's belief that staff are looking to trap students, and emphasis is being placed upon raising awareness of these services and how they can be harmful. More work is required to emphasise what is considered plagiarism to raise awareness with students.

Alex Hedlund reiterated Emily's comments, and explained that contract cheating has been a huge problem in other countries leading to laws being introduced there to prevent it. Alex is working with the University on better guidance for students on contract cheating and plagiarism.

CAITLIN MYLES – Are there assurances in place to help alleviate worries about grades being scaled down under the safety net policy

Alex responded that the safety net policy works on a case-by-case basis, and scales the grades based upon all factors.

JENYA MORRICE – How have University staff been dealing with safety regarding COVID for students in on campus accommodation?

Colin Aitken explained that the University is taking the necessary steps to ensure that Halls are safe, students are supported especially if they are in self-isolation.

Jenya followed up to explain one student felt the rules on campus were invasive.

Emily King responded that the Safeguarding and ResLife Teams are having to abide by not only University policy as well as Government guidelines to ensure HW does not experience the same large transmission situations as other Scottish Universities have experienced. The Student Union has also supported the University through wellbeing calls to self-isolating students etc. Emily outlined she would be happy to hear more from any specific students if they have concerns or problems.

LIZ LAU – Can you explain what has been done to decolonise the curriculum?

Alex Hedlund explained that decolonising the curriculum is difficult as our international campuses enjoy having a UK based curriculum. Work is ongoing with the University to get the platform working.

9.7. The Chair asked if there were any other questions. There were none.

9.8. The meeting voted as a majority to **accept** the officer reports.

10. MOTIONS AND POLICY

Sustainable Development in the Union: Colin Aitken spoke for 1 minute on the motion.

10.1.1. **Q: PETER BUCHANAN – What will the student led advisory groups aim to accomplish?**

Answer: Colin Aitken answered these groups are to ensure students are heard and can make a difference. They will help to draft and set policies (such as this one) and can look at all aspects and areas of our services. The group can also provide information on potential ideas and initiatives.

10.1.2. **Q: AMY McATEER – How will sustainable development be incorporated into all curricula such as languages courses?**

Answer: Alex Hedlund is keen to embed sustainable development into the curriculum. He has worked with the Deputy Vice Principal for Education and Student Life to ensure that not just environmental sustainability is incorporated into curriculum including gender equality, economic equality etc. This might be through specific projects etc.

10.1.3. **Speech Against:** No members offered to speak against the motion.

10.1.4. The meeting voted as a majority to **accept** the motion.

Remove groupwork assessments from the curricula: James Kilgour spoke for 1 minute on the motion

10.1.5. **Q: LACHLAN KEAY – Why get rid of group work entirely, and life is full of working with other people. Does this not prevent people from being well-rounded for future life? Would it be better to reform group work rather than ban it?**

Answer: James Kilgour explained that assessment are due to reflect individual's achievement which are shown in your transcript which is required by many graduate employers. There are other options for demonstrating working with others through part-time jobs and volunteering.

10.1.6. **Q: FRANKIE HULME – Is there ability to apply this motion to only certain Schools / Programmes rather than blanket across all courses?**

Answer: James Kilgour explained that is an important aspect, however the key grievance is the unequal distribution of labour within group work. An option would be a simple "Pass or Fail" option or individuals are assessed on separate components of pre-defined segments of contribution.

10.1.7. **Q: SAMANTHA HAMLET – Would the motion be better aiming at changing the marking aspect of group assessments rather than removing them completely?**

Answer: James Kilgour replied that if group work is required to demonstrate ability to work together so ideally removed completely, however if it is to be maintained then assessment should be purely based upon individuals contribution not one mark for the whole group.

10.1.8. **Speech Against: LACHLAN KEAY spoke for one minute against the motion.**

Reforming group work assessment rather than removal of group work as a whole, such as individuals submitting their own part of the group work for separate marking, in order to ensure students leave as full, well-rounded students for future lives.

Speech For: LESLEY NICOL spoke for one minute for the motion.

Within the workplace group work is important, however within the University environment causes problems. The wording of the policy is to remove the assessment component of group work rather than removing the group work completely. In work there is a line manager to influence those not performing, however this doesn't exist within group work.

Speech Against: BLAIR SMYTH spoke for one minute against the motion.

Rather than remove group work, the process of group work should be reformed through providing better support from teaching staff to support the process.

10.1.9. The meeting voted as a majority to **reject** the motion.

Implement a policy for Student Union social media standards: Caitlin Archibald spoke for 1 minute on the motion

1.1.1.Q: JAMES KILGOUR – Are the proposers aware the University supported the post including Reslife who shared the post and commented on it?

Answer: Caitlin Archibald wasn't aware the post referred to in the motion. As Caitlin assumes a post like this will not happen again, is it not better to simply make policy that it isn't to happen.

JAMES KILGOUR – the motion assumes that this sort of post would become the norm. This post was no more consequential than previous posts.

1.1.2.Q: AN – Are there specific guidelines in mind that should be included in social media posts?

Answer: Caitlin Archibald feels the policy should be in line with what the Society standards are. This motion is to put societies and the Student Union on an equal playing field.

1.1.3.Q: COLIN AITKEN – Is this motion aimed at the way the society standards policy was put forward or is it relating to the post?

Answer: Callum Brown explained it is partly linked to how the society standards policy was created as it was forced through. However there are still issues with the post itself.

Emily King – The motion discusses the post has been strongly criticised – how many is the propose aware have been impacted?

Answer: Callum Brown most of MACS School Officers and Reps and around 30 MACS students – it was felt that 70% thought it was inappropriate and not fully suitable.

1.1.4. Speech Against: JAMES KILGOUR spoke for one minute against the motion.

This assumes that societies and the Union are equal – societies affiliate with the Union

Uni approves the post

Some students don't take issue with the post.

Speech For: CALLUM BROWN outlined the Union's 5 values. The social media policy should be focussed on these values – there should be a way to communicate based on these values.

Speech Against: Chido Gidiri outlined that the Student Union allows societies the space. It is similar to a student telling a lecturer what to do. There is a difference between the Union and societies and the rules shouldn't be the same. This isn't that big of a deal.

1.1.5. The meeting voted as a majority to **reject** the motion.

1.2. Policy Lapse

1.2.1. The Chair explained to the meeting that the three policies noted in the Agenda would lapse unless the meeting voted to keep them.

1.2.2. Street Lighting on Campus

1.2.3. Provision of a quiet chill out space on campus

1.2.4. Include a wider range of healthy food in the SU

- 1.2.5. The Chair asked that if anyone wants to keep any of the policies they should raise their hand and be prepared to speak in support of the policy.
- PETER BUCHANAN spoke FOR the Healthy Food options. Peter feels it seems reasonable to not let the healthier food option policy fall.
- COLIN AITKEN spoke AGAINST the Healthy Food options. The policy is out of date and the sustainability policy could now replace this policy.
- PETER BUCHANAN spoke FOR the healthy food options. The shop doesn't allow for water with the meal deal which isn't healthy.
- CHIDO GIDIRI spoke AGAINST the healthy food options. Healthy eating is part of a wider aspect of keeping healthy including exercise.
- The meeting voted as a majority to renew the Healthy Food options motion.
- 1.2.6. The Chair confirmed the remaining policies were now lapsed.

2. AOCB

- 2.1. There was none.

3. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 3.1. It was agreed the next AGM would take place in February 2022.

The Meeting closed at 8.00PM