**Student Council**

**Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10th February 2015 from 17:15 in EE1107**

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| 1. **Present**

**Student Councillors:** Tom Clarke (Vice President Education), Abi Clarke (Vice President Student Activities), Helen Manners (Mature Students’ Officer), Savannah Ju (Non-UK Students’ Officer), Jack Buczynski (RAG Officer), Jess Cashin (LGBT Officer), Connor Allen (Student Disability Officer), Vanessa Gordon (Sustainability Officer), Georgie Bull (Welfare Officer), Becky-Lou Small (LGBT Students), Ben Norris (Mature Students), Madalina Orzan-Dragos (Postgraduate students), Thomas Beale (RAG), Alice Gentle (RAG), Tina Wootton-Porter (SU societies), Diane Noble (Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts), Nicki Le Page (Institute of Science and the Environment), Munifa Rauf (Black and minority ethnic students), Jeremy Hanley-Keeley (commuting students), Val Turner (co-opted), Philip Brookes (co-opted), Zac Pritchard (co-opted), Chris Newbould (co-opted)Also in attendance: Ellen Joyce (Chair), Ruth Christie (Membership Services Manager), Frances Storey (applicant)No longer members of Student Council: Joe Hayes (SU societies), Joshua Ware (SU sports)Absent: Michael Sherratt (community volunteering), Sarah Meyrick (Institute of Health and Society), Rebecca Jones (Sustainability) |
| 1. **Apologies**

Wes Hudson (President), Christina Harris (Minority Ethnic Officer), Chantal Vinyard (Women’s Officer), Claudia Calin (Non-UK students), Alex Giles (Institute of Sport and Exercise Science), Mihaela Getzova (Worcester Business School) |
| 1. **Application to join Student Council**

Frances Storey has applied to join Student Council to represent students with a disability. The chair invited Frances to explain her reasons for applying. Frances said that, as a student with a disability, she has felt let down by some of the support services available to her at University and wants to help other students to have a voice and to press for improvements.Frances was asked to leave the room and the Student Councillors present at the time (18) were asked to vote on whether she should be admitted to Student Council. 17 voted to admit Frances and 1 abstained. Frances was invited back into the room and welcomed as a new Student Councillor.  |
| 1. **Minutes of the previous Student Council meeting held on Tuesday 13th January 2015**

These were approved as an accurate record of the meeting. |
| 1. **Matters arising from the minutes**

Diane pointed out that Alice Gentle has not yet been approved by Student Council as a new student trustee of Worcester Students’ Union (the previous meeting having been inquorate at the time at which this item was raised). The chair asked Alice to leave the room and Student Council voted unanimously (18 votes) to approve Alice’s appointment as a charity trustee. Alice was invited back. |
| 1. **Officers’ reports**

The chair drew attention to the officers’ reports which had been circulated in advance of the meeting and asked whether there were any questions or whether any officers had anything to add.The Vice President Education reported on his visit, together with Mature Students’ Officer and Institute Rep, Helen Manners, to Roche in Cornwall. The University has around 600 students based in the South-West and the visit was very successful. 7 StARs (out of around 35) attended and some had travelled a considerable distance to be there. He and Helen held a question and answer session with the StARs, which went very well. They are keen to have their own “celebration week” and the full-time officers may be invited to attend the awards event. Tom has already been asked to return to Cornwall on 6th May.*At this point, a further three Student Councillors arrived, bringing the total number present up to 21.*The Vice President Student Activities apologised for not having submitted a written report and explained that she’d been off work the previous week with tonsillitis. She reported that she and the President had delivered a number of induction talks for new international students and nursing students. She understood that Refreshers’ Week events had a mixed reception. Night-time events at Tramps were well-attended and, while the sports and activities fair was not as successful as it might have been, some clubs were very pleased. The newly-formed pole fitness society, for instance, reported that 35 students had “signed up” to join. Abi said that she and the President have helped with the workshops being run for potential election candidates and she is also working with national bodies and Disability Sport Worcester to expand and develop the range of disability sports available to students. Abi also explained that she is trying to encourage committee members of sports clubs and societies to log their volunteering hours. The Student Disability Officer apologised for the lack of a written report. He is still awaiting responses from the Head of Student Services and the Director of Estates and Facilities to some of his requests and suggestions concerning disability access and support and is considering approaching John Ryan direct. Connor is also in discussions concerning introducing wheelchair rugby and has met with the Director of Sport Partnerships and Community Engagement to talk about the establishment of a disability sports committee.Abi advised that, as John Ryan only works two days a week now, it’s unlikely that Connor would be able to see him.The RAG Officer reported that Refreshers’ Week was good for RAG, although the final amount raised is yet to be finalised. The RAG committee is currently organising events for Red Nose Day (Friday 13th March) and is exploring the idea of a darts night in the SU and a comedy night in Mode. Those involved with RAG need to be reminded to log their volunteering hours. Jack suggested that the next RAG Officer might consider introducing hall RAG reps, to develop competition between halls of residence in relation to fundraising. The Non-UK Students’ Officer said that the exam period has now finished and a number of students for whom English is not a first language have reported that there were questions they did not understand.The Welfare Officer reported that she has been working with the Strategic Director for Health and Wellbeing, with the aim of having a mental health professional on campus who’s able to prescribe medication. Asked what evidence there was for a demand for such a service, Georgie explained that this was an idea which was being explored, but she agreed that lobbying for an additional mental health advisor and/or expanding the counselling service might be preferable. The chair suggested that Georgie might set up a working group to consider the best options. The Suicide Safer Project proposal was discussed at some length. There were concerns about the suggestion that all academic tutors would be trained, as students might be anxious talking to their tutor about problems which might be misinterpreted. Others argued that it was important that all staff should be aware of danger signs. Tom felt that it might be difficult to get staff engaged. Connor commented that, when he attended the Equality and Diversity committee, he was shocked to learn that none of the staff present had received training in equality and diversity issues. Zac asked whether staff know where to signpost students presenting with mental health problems. Abi said that a lot of information has been published, including booklets which are available from Firstpoint, but these resources are not well promoted.Madalina asked whether there are any mechanisms for evaluating the effectiveness of the equality and diversity training. Connor said that there are no checks on who has undertaken the online training, so it would not be possible to evaluate the effectiveness in terms of behaviour change and outcomes.A number of Councillors felt that staff are so stretched that it would be unrealistic to expect them to undertake additional responsibilities and that even finding time for a short meeting is difficult. Georgie explained that staff would be given a day off to undertake the “Suicide Safer” training.The Sustainability Officer said that the “Pearl the Polar Bear” action plan has been submitted to NUS. Wes has met with Matt Smith to discuss running halls competitions.The chair asked if there were any more questions or comments from Student Councillors relating to the officers’ reports. Concern was raised that the President had not submitted a report. It was acknowledged that he was absent from the meeting due to illness, but he had been at work the previous week when reports were due in. Since the last Student Council meeting the President has been to various significant meetings including the SU’s Board of Trustees and the University’s Board of Governors. It was pointed out that one of the key functions of Student Council is to hold elected officers to account, so it’s essential that all officers report on their activities.  |
| 1. **Exam regulations for international students**

The Non-UK Students’ Officer explained that international students on certain courses, where students are allowed to take other notes and reference materials into an exam, would like to be able to take a dictionary too, so that they can look up words in exam questions with which they’re not familiar. There were differences of opinion, with some Student Councillors suggesting that, if international students are allowed dictionaries, this should be an option for all students. Munifa suggested that sometimes students with English as a first language don’t understand exam questions either and a better option might be workshops for all students to help them with exam questions and how to structure answers. It was also pointed out that some students who are classes as “international” actually have English as their first language and it would not be fair if they are allowed to take dictionaries into exams when home students can’t. Abi said that the University requires a [certain level of English fluency for entry](http://www.worcester.ac.uk/community/international-language-requirements-support.html) and exams should be written in a way which does not exceed this level. Savannah explained that what international students want is permission to take in a first language to English dictionary (eg French – English), which just gives a straight translation of individual words, rather than an English dictionary which provides definitions. Munifa commented that SOAS, where 35% of students are international, allows this.Connor pointed out that the work of students with dyslexia is marked sensitively, rather than the students being allowed to take in dictionaries to exams. Fran made the point that, if there is only one student in a class whose work is subject to “sensitive marking”, their work cannot be submitted and marked anonymously. Tom suggested that Savannah should arrange to speak to the Pro Vice Chancellor (International), Dr Heather Forland, to discuss further the language dictionary issue. |
| 1. **Voter eligibility in the SU leadership elections**

The chair introduced the Turning Point electronic voting system (borrowed from the University), which allows everyone to vote anonymously, with the results immediately shown on-screen. She ran a few tests to ensure that the system was working at that all Student Councillors understood how it worked. Two more Student Councillors had arrived, so there were now 23 present and entitled to vote. Ellen explained that Student Council is being asked to discuss and decide whether voters in the forthcoming SU elections should be asked to self-define in order to vote in the polls for the following positions:LGBT OfficerMinority Ethnic OfficerNon-UK Students’ OfficerStudent Disability OfficerWomen’s OfficerStudents wishing to apply to be a candidate for any of these positions are required to self-define as belonging to the group they wish to represent.A lively debate followed, focusing first on the LGBT Officer position, but including discussions about the other roles in question. The key points are summarised below:In favour of allowing all students to vote * Any student may have a strong view about who’s best suited to represent a particular group, even if they themselves aren’t part of that group
* Any elected person has the power to affect anyone else’s life, so all student should have the right to vote for all officers
* Allowing all students to vote means that you can help support friends who do belong to that group
* Some straight people have to put up with homophobia too
* Students should be able to vote for all of the positions, because they may have a view about the mix of candidates who would make an effective team together
* It’s wrong to assume that only people who “belong” to a particular group have a view about how the members of that group would be best represented
* It would be great to have a man as Women’s Officer
* Students who vote through the volunteers’ iPads may feel uncomfortable if they think it’s obvious they’re taking longer to vote because they’re self-defining
* Having very close friends or family members who are disabled or LGBT, for instance, means I’m very familiar with the issues they face and I’d therefore want to have a say in who represents them
* We should be aiming for better integration of students, rather than reinforcing the differences between groups
* As a paid representative working for the NHS, I represent 227,000 patients, many of whom have disabilities, for instance, but I can bring a wealth of experience to this role and ensure that their interests are represented in a professional way

In favour of restricting voting for the above positions to students who self-identify* If you’re LGBT, it’s offensive if a straight person claims to be able to speak, or vote, on your behalf
* Students should be required to self-define. You can’t know what it is to be LGBT if you’re not
* The LGBT community needs unifying representatives
* If all students are allowed to vote, there’s a danger that their votes would outnumber the votes of the self-identifying students, leading to the election of a candidate not supported by those who are part of the group being “represented”
* The NUS liberation campaigns are a response to the structural problems and discrimination faced by students who are women, LGBT, BAME or have a disability. The aim of the campaigns is to try to counter their underrepresentation in society in general and to break the “chains”
* No-one who’s outside the community can understand the struggle of those in it
* There are lots of ways of getting involved with supporting people without voting, such as the “Friends of LGBT” groups
* Please be “with us but never for us” – give us our voice because we normally don’t have one. The effect of allowing everyone to vote for our representatives is to water down our voice again
* The reason for having these part-time officer positions is to ensure that students who are underrepresented in general have a means of having their voice heard. If we allow everyone a say in who these representative should be, we might as well not have part-time officers and simply have full-time officers
* To be equal, you have to go beyond the norms and push boundaries
* It’s important to distinguish between sympathy and empathy and between equity and equality
* The history of people making decisions on behalf of others is worrying
* It’s not included in the list, but can we also discuss whether students should self-define as mature if they wish to vote in the Mature Students’ Officer election?

During this discussion and debate, two Student Councillors had to leave, so there were now 22 Student Councillors present and eligible to vote. The Chair presented Student Council with three options for each of the part-time officer roles under consideration. Using the Turning Point system, the votes were as follows:

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|  | Yes | No | Abstain |
| **LGBT Officer role: Should students be required to self-define as LGBT to vote in this election?** | 17 | 4 | 1 |
| **Minority Ethnic Officer role: Should students be required to self-define as BAME to vote in this election?** | 16 | 5 | 1 |
| **Non-UK Students’ Officer role: Should voting be confined to international students?** | 16 | 5 | 1 |
| **Student Disability Officer: Should students be required to self-define as having a disability to vote in this election?** | 16 | 5 | 1 |
| **Mature Students’ Officer: Should students be required to self-define as mature to vote in this election?**  | 17 | 4 | 1 |
| **Women’s Officer: Should voting be confined to students who define as women?**  | 15 | 5 | 2 |
| According to Student Council’s wishes, in the forthcoming SU leadership elections (2nd to 6th March), students will be required to self-define to vote in the elections for the LGBT Officer, Minority Ethnic Officer, Student Disability Officer and Mature Students’ Officer. Restrictions will be set to confine voting for the Non-UK Students’ Officer role to international students and to confine voting for the Women’s Officer role to students who have defined at registration as women. |

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| 1. **Cuts to services**

This motion asks the SU Executive to undertake research into the effect of the reduction in the amount students are able to borrow under the University’s Access to Learning Fund. It appears that a number of students who are in financial hardship, for instance, are now living at the YMCA. The chair asked Student Council to vote on this motion, which would mandate the Executive to undertake research and discover if there is evidence that the cuts in provision are having a significant impact on students. Votes to carry the motion: 17Votes not to carry the motion: 1Abstentions: 4  |
| 1. **Selling The Sun in the SU shop**

There was a proposal that the SU shop should start selling The Sun again, now that the paper’s Page 3 no longer features topless models. It was pointed out that there has been no undertaking not to reintroduce Page 3 and the motion was withdrawn. A number of Student Councillors felt that, as a place of learning and education, there should be no place for “newspapers” which do little to educate people. |
| 1. **Reporting on Student Council matters by Student Councillors**

Concern has been expressed by a number of Student Councillors about articles available online which have been written by a Student Councillor which criticise Student Council and some of its decisions. The writer is no longer a member of Student Council. Whilst any student may attend the meetings as an observer and is free to comment on proceedings, it was agreed that members of Student Council should be confident that the meeting is a safe place where they can speak candidly and freely in order to express the views of the students they represent and that they will not be misquoted or criticised by other Student Councillors outside of council meetings.  |
| 1. **New societies**

Ethnic Students’ SocietyAbi said that this constitution should be brought to the next Student Council so that the Minority Ethnic Students’ Officer can present it and answer any questions.Green Party SocietyThis new society was approved, with 20 Student Councillors voting for approval, 1 against and 1 abstaining.Golf SocietyThis new society was approved, with 20 Student Councillors voting for approval, 1 against and 1 abstaining.  |
| 1. **The next meeting of Student Council will be held on Tuesday 10th March from 17:15 – 19:15 in EE1107.**

**All reports, proposals and any other relevant documents must be received by the chair by 9:00p.m on Friday 6th March. Any materials received after this time will not be included on the agenda and will not be discussed at the meeting.**  |