

Student Council Minutes

February 1 2023

Introduction

The Chair, Merian Alit, welcomed everyone and asks them to register their attendance. Noted that the meeting is hybrid (partly online) so to keep this in mind during discussions.

The Chair then went over the agenda for the meeting which included elections overview, feedback session on the assessment period, updates from Officers, and an overview of the lapsing Union policy.

Elections Overview

The Chair introduced Megan Robertson, the Campaigns & Democracy Coordinator, gave the elections overview. They went over the results from the NUS by-election which included Victoria Boulton, Jade Thomas, Merian Alit, Rhiannon Jenkins and now Sam Francis. Megan explained the delegation is important because they will be representing the Union and students when it comes to voting on national policy as well as influencing the next year's work at NUS.

Megan then explained nominations for the Spring Elections are now open until February 23rd. This involves electing next year's Part-Time and Full-Time Officer teams. More information can be found on the leicesterunion.com/elections page including roles information, workshop dates, and support.

Chair reiterated the importance of the elections and casting your vote, even if you don't run, as it decides your representatives.

Feedback Session – January Assessments & Exams

Chair then introduced the feedback session segment of meeting. This took place on padlet.com and the summary of submissions are currently being compiled by the Voice Team to upload onto the Student Council page and disseminate to SU representatives. There were a total of 65 posts and 70 contributors from online and offline.

President, Rhiannon Jenkins, then explained there could be a live discussion between those online and offline. This was for those who wanted to speak instead, or alongside, the Padlet format.

One student raised that they feared the assessment format is taking away the accessibility that was provided during Covid. Another student added many students haven't had in person exams for years and so not able to get used to it. Another added they did not think support was good and staff on course would not even offer mock exams. Formative assessments and examples not being provided was also highlighted as an issue.

Rhiannon then asked who thought they had received good support and only a few hands were raised. These came from courses schools such as Psychology, Business, and Biological Sciences. Other student feedback was that they were also on these courses but did not think support was sufficient and an Economics student also added to this. Feedback also flagged that first years were not receiving adequate help preparing for assessments. It was noted some cannot have mock due to accreditation requirements on the course.

Another student (Human Resources Management) said it was hard as there was only 30 minutes to write out two 1000 word essays. A lot of pressure was put on them and their lecturer expected good sources which aren't even available in library.

General comments included that lecturers had not been clear on expectations and a Psychology student said there was misleading advice during the assessments.

A student flagged the online Library was not accessible over Winter break and so could not get in as staff were not working for some of the days.

Rhiannon thanks everyone for their contributions and closed highlighting that their course, or school, reps can receive feedback and student can also get support from SU Advice. They are full separate from the University and confidential.

Officer Updates

The Chair then moved onto the updates section from the Executive Officer Team.

AnneMarie Deeb – Education Officer

- Work on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) went well and the submissions have been written up into the report. Next steps include working on the action plan based off the report in order to make changes based on the feedback from students.

- Destress Week during exams also went well to the point that AnneMarie and Hoor ran out of freebies. AnneMarie gave out fruit and academic conduct workshops were also ran to support students during assessments.
- Academic Forums are coming up so it is important to make sure you are feeding back to your Course Reps so they represent you in these meetings.
- Also working on Strategy Development to improve issues like communications and feedback processes to ensure the strategy is working towards goals.
- Lastly, AnneMarie highlighted that with the Spring Elections opening, she is already working on her handover and looking over the Education Officer role for the future Officer.

Rhiannon Jenkins - President

- Continuing to work on the Sticky Campus project with University. This is about improving the campus for students so they want to spend more time here. It includes new things such as pool tables, the new meal deals, helping campus be better space for socialising and studying. The full report will be out next week and Rhiannon asks students to continue contacting with ideas as well as areas that need improvement.
 - A student asked if the University can ensure defibrillators are provided on campus and another added that there should be more posted by the George Davies Centre. Rhiannon explained there are some on campus but will work on making it easier to find these as we as feeding the comments back to the project. This is because some did not know they existed or where to find them. Jade Thomas, BAME Officer, confirmed there was also one outside the Deli near Charles Wilson.
- Rhiannon is also working on a Governance Review to ensure democracy is working for all students.
- Estates masterplan which is created by the University to outline plans for the next decade is an area Rhiannon is feeding into. This includes increase, and improving, classrooms, prayer spaces, study areas to make sure they are nice places for students to use. Any specific spaces that need help should be flagged to Rhiannon to as some budget is available things like repairs or better furniture.
 - One student flagged that as an International Student, they are encouraged to come over with families but the accommodation is not sufficient. They wanted to know if the University would provide specific accommodation as private properties cannot and there is little childcare support. Rhiannon explained they have raised this issue

with the University but they will not commit to more rooms currently as 1000 have just been planned. However, working with Trustees and SUlets on improving this and increasing family friendly accommodation. She also flagged that there is a childcare friendly space in Percy Gee where students can work with their children.

- Another student mentioned that the University is not helpful and will just signpost to Zoopla/Rightmove as well as other just general signposting. Rhiannon said she will take this to the next relevant meeting as it is not appropriate support.
- Student Engagement is also another big piece of work with a new working group having been created to help with engagement.

After this update, another student brought up an issue their friend had experience with Library Services. It concerns an Italian International Student who speaks a few language but their English skills are not as strong. They needed help with their Visa but was not taken seriously and just sent round multiple teams over and over. Rhiannon explained they have been bringing this up but University will not employ more staff due to the need for GDPR training, when suggested student staff were taken on they would not commit to this. Currently they are chasing them on decreasing the wait time on emails as this is slowing down what support there is.

Archie Robinson – Sports Officer

Due to commitments that clashed with Council, Archie could not attend so Jack McDonald (Activities Officer) delivered Archie's update as they work closely together.

- Parasport weekend is coming up in March from the 3rd to the 5th. Archie has been working on this because para-athlete alumni are celebrated but an offer does not actually exist in the University. Therefore the weekend has been planned with activities like wheelchair rugby with Leicester Tigers and GB coaches (3rd), goalball tournament (4th), and Sitting Volleyball (5th). The last two events will be ran by Sports Council who are a group of elected students who work with Archie to improve the Sports offer at Leicester. All students are welcome to get involved with the weekend.
- During Varsity, there will be a body positivity campaigns called 'This body enables me' alongside Varsity coverage. The goal is to raise £3000 for the eating disorder charity BEAT as well as get clubs involved with this and events to push the campaign to more students.

- Archie is also working with AnneMarie (Education Officer) on cooking classes called Recipe for Success. This will teach students about making nutritional and cost effective meals of those who want to get involved. If the project is successful, it will become a continuous project.
- Archie is currently working with Team Leicester on a membership audit. This will go through current costings and create a transparent view of what students get out of the £150 memberships. This will be compared to 40 University's ahead of us in BUCS to see if we need to lower the costing.

As Jack was up presenting, a student asked if there are any progress on better storage for groups as they are not used well Rhiannon explained, as it is part of Sticky Campus, that a full review is being undertaken. Jack added this is also a goal of the SU Activities team.

Jack McDonald – Activities Officer

- Jack updated on Grant Funding for this year. This is a pot of money that all groups can apply for and has been incredibly popular this year. Due to this, there is still £20k worth of applications still pending. As there is only £6k left, Jack and the Activities team are working on a way to allocate this. They are also working on a plan to hopefully get more funding from the University due to its popularity. It's a great sign that students are engaged but has of course caused some difficulties due to the increase in demand.
- Jack is also working on re-instating and improving the Volunteering Hub. Due to a lack of capacity since Covid, it is not where the team currently wants it to be. Therefore they are working to redevelop it and lobby the University for more resources so capacity can be increased. This should result in a better hub and more roles available.
 - A student asked what was currently available and Rhiannon flagged that students can still currently find opportunities via the main Union Instagram (@leicesterunion), societies and the Career Hub. Jack also added the 'Big Sleep' is coming up and can find more information on the University website.
 - Another student asked if there is a timeline, Jack explained staff are currently working on a paper to outline the process so they can start and a timeline will come after this. A different student also asked about the timeline and Jack said he was optimistic that it could be implemented by summer or next academic year.

- Jack was also asked what are the factors needed to improving the Hub? Jack explained it exists but inactive so need externals to sign up and get more resources to create capacity.
- Go Green Week is also taking place on the 13th as part of RAG (Raising and Giving) month. The month is into Sexual Violence Awareness Week, Go Green Week and ends with a week dedicated to raising around LGBTQ+ History Month. Go Green Week will include lots of accessible activities like litter picks, an upcycling workshop, cooking classes on avoiding waste, and a Sustainability 101 workshop.
- The University has asked Jack to also look at engagement from Maths students. They say it is low and as Jack comes from a Mathematics degree, he may be able to help improve it. As part of this, a survey is currently running for any student on a Maths related course to give feedback on what they need to achieve this.
- Committee training and handover is also being reviewed over the next two months in order to create comprehensive and helpful preparation for new committees next year.

Hoor Pathan – Wellbeing Officer

Due to commitments that clashed with Council, Hoor could not attend so AnneMarie Deeb (Education Officer) delivered Hoor's update as they have been working closely together.

- Regarding the Free Breakfasts Scheme, turnout has been more than 95 students each day and today's breakfast had 116 students attend. AnneMarie encouraged students to attend in order to get breakfast and make friends. It runs Monday to Friday from 8 AM to 10 AM.
 - A student asked where the common room is and was directed to the lower floor of the Percy gee Building. This can be access via the lower door or by going down the stairs after entering the main SU entrance.
- On Period Products, the university has committed to changing over the dispensers to make them gender neutral. They will now be plain with the SU and UoL logo
 - A student asked why they need to be gender neutral. Rhiannon explained that the current dispensers are not trans inclusive ('Hey girls!' branding) and disregards students who do not identify as women but still need access to period products.
- AnneMarie briefly went over Destress again, explaining Hoor put on sessions on aromatherapy, crafts, Guide Dogs, and thank everyone who engaged with the week.

- Lastly, AnneMarie flagged the Sexual Violence Awareness week starts on the 6th of February. Hoor will be hosting events and sharing information to encourage conversations on the topic. There will also be sessions around wellness, self-care, and information from Jasmine's House where any money raised will go to. You can find more information by checking the Wellbeing Instagram @leicswellbeing.

Nic Farmer – Liberation Officer

Nic is currently off due to sickness and so the Chair shared his main update. This was to highlight that this month is LGBTQ+ History Month and there are a lot of events on that students can get involved with. These can all be found on leicesterunion.com/whatson

Policy Overview

Chair then introduced Megan again to come up and give an overview of Union Policy and those currently lapsing.

Megan explained that currently there are 39 policies due to expire this year. Each policy is submitted by students, or representatives, and is in place for 3 years. Some may be fine to expire as student priorities change but students are encouraged to look at those expiring in case they would like to have them resubmitted. During this week, Megan will update the Student Council page with a table of expiring policies and the full booklet for students to review. If a student does want to work on a policy to present at next council, they only need to email su-council@leicester.ac.uk and the Voice team will support them through the process.

The previous policy does not have to be the same as changes can be made, or new ones created at any time. A student asked if they can present policies from students on their course. This is fine but Rhiannon pointed out anyone can attend Student Council so can also work on it themselves too. Another student asked if it could be around transport and Megan confirmed as it can be on any topic if it's important to students. They also highlighted the Ideas System as a way to pass policy as votes are needed to confirm students are interested in the policy.

Any Other Business

Parking Fees

A student asked about parking and Rhiannon explained that there are discounts available at the new Freeman's parking space. The details of this can be found at

<https://uniofleicester.sharepoint.com/sites/staff/parking/parking-university/SitePages/Student%20Parking.aspx>" or by emailing esc-service@le.ac.uk

Jade Thomas, BAME Officer, highlighted that after a BAME Students Network Meeting a podcast idea has been implemented. Currently there will be ten episodes looking at issues relating to the LGBTQ+, International, Asian, and Black student experience. If anyone wants to be involved, they should email Jade at su-bame@leicester.ac.uk

Current UCU Strike Action

Regarding strikes, a few students brought up questions.

A student asked how the SU is reacting to the current strikes since the poll last term indicated they should be in favour of them. Rhiannon explained that since the poll set the precedent for all planned strikes for the year and so the statement from the Union in November still stands. At this time in the year a marking and assessment boycott was not in the plans. However, if the strike action changes, then a new poll will be undertaken to find out how students want to proceed in regards to support. The current precedent means that supporting the strikes includes letting UCU use the SU building for meetings, visiting picket lines, and a plan to hold a panel this month.

This will take place on February the 14th at 4.30 PM (location to be confirmed) with a panel made up of UCU members and University management for an open discussion with students. The SU, and Executive Officers, still currently support the strikes while also advocating for students. Rhiannon has also asked the Vice Chancellor (VC) to make a statement on not refunding pensions but this is not be accepted at the moment.

This all means we advocate for students and still support you while balancing with supporting lecturers. They are considering changing pay in the future but not yet decided.

The student followed up by saying that if we are supporting and not expressing unhappiness with the strikes, will this lead to the University not caring? Suggested because it will not impact their finances but if students make it about money then the University would act. Rhiannon pointed out the SU has not stayed silent and is creating an email template so students can individually, or collectively, write to the VC about strike action. This will be out by next Wednesday but NUS also has one students can use before then. Students can also attend the panel to raise issues with the strike and disruption to learning.

A student in Contemporary Literature explained that they were annoyed to be missing content and suggested writing to the VC. They pointed out that emails to Liz Jones (Pro-Vice-Chancellor Education) only produced automated responses. Rhiannon suggested doing a drop-in session next week to create a letter. She also added the students can, and are encouraged by UCU, to attend the picket line with all dates on the UCU Leicester website.

Adam Morgan (Accessibility Officer) spoke to say they had attended the strikes with other students today and the Athena where Claudia Webb MP spoke. This was alongside lectures and other services striking, being met with lots of public support. He added it was a good atmosphere.

Another student asked where they can get more information and Rhiannon committed to creating new posts on her Instagram to give an overview of useful information. This will also include information on where to get compensation and Rhiannon pointed out students have raised issues with the compensation system from last year. Because of this, students can flag to Executives that they are seeking this and get help from the SU, if they encounter issues. Students should also keep track of cancelled lectures (or where lecturer is absent) by taking photos of the empty room in order to keep as evidence for compensation.

A student asked how to get compensation if you do not have evidence and was advised that lecturers should have flagged with timetabling to record this. In either case, students can contact SU Advice for support doing this.

Visas

Student asked about Visa as they needed to apply for another but wasn't sure how to do this. Due to delays with the visa team, they could not complete it for months. It was taking weeks, and at times months, to get a reply. A student simple FAQ should be provided and Rhiannon agreed. She also added SU Advice can be contacted on topics like Visas, plagiarism and other advice completely separate to the University.

Close

Merian thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 7:22 PM

The next meeting is March 3rd 2023 at 6 PM

Location TBC (to be confirmed).