



# Union Council Minutes

Date: Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

Time: 15:00

Venue: Arts A4

## 1. Attendance and apologies

### Council members attending (21):

Jess Bayliss	LGBTQ Rep	Maya Lane	Women's Group Rep
Nick Beard	Postgrad Councillor	Jenny Legg	Councillor for LifeSci
Tom Bucher	Community Engagement Officer	Ian Llewellyn	Councillor for LPS
Catarina Carvalho	Councillor for Global Studies	Kelly McBride	Equality & Diversity Officer
David Cichon	President	Becca Melhuish	Operations Officer
Ariel Cohen	Communications Officer	Chukwuma Okonkwo	Black Students' Rep
Poppy Firmin	Education Officer	Irene Pournara	International Students' Rep
Lucy Freedman	Councillor for English	Scarlett Storr	Councillor for Psychology
Sarah Clavel	Councillor for BMEc	Bobby Treweek	Ethical & Environment Officer
James Hickie	Activities Officer	Nad Williams	Councillor for HAHP
Indi Hicks	Welfare Officer		

### Apologies for absence (4):

Taz Brookes	Disabled Students' Rep	Keith Fung	Postgrad Councillor
Kieran Burn	Postgrad Councillor	Dilan Joshi	Councillor for BSMS

*John Allcock*      *Democracy/Rep coordinator*

### Other absences (4):

Alex Anpilogov	Media Development Officer	Paul Malget	Councillor for MFM
Bobby Harkess	Councillor for Informatics	Ashwin Persaud	Councillor for EngDes

### Also present:

*Paul Newton*      *Union Director*      *John Warmington*      *Minutes*

There were 19 voting members present initially out of 29, therefore the meeting was quorate.

- 1. Declaration of any conflicts of interest with matters on the agenda.** Nick Beard informed Council that she had been employed by NUS in connection with the National Student Survey which was an item on the agenda.
- 2. Minutes of Council meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> November.** These were approved.
- 3. Matters arising.** None were raised
- 4. Students' Union Budget for 2011-12.** This had been debated at the last (inquorate) meeting and was put to the vote for formal approval. Council AGREED to approve the Budget with 0 votes against and 3 abstentions.

5. **Appointments of Council members to positions.** *Reps on E&E committee:* This was deferred to later in the meeting, at which point Catarina Carvalho and Jenny Legg were both interested and Council agreed would both should be invited to attend the committee. *Reps on Activities Committee:* Indi Hicks expressed interest and Council agreed her appointment; other places remain available. *Deputy chair of Council:* No nominations were made. *Returning Officer:* Becca Melhuish had held this position so far this year and Council needed to appoint a RO for the sabbatical and other elections in term 2. Becca said it was preferable for a full-time Officer (provided they were not to be a candidate and could be impartial) so that the RO was available frequently during the busy election period. She proposed Ariel Cohen and this was AGREED.
6. **Rules on Members' Meetings.** These had been presented at the last (inquorate) meeting and Council AGREED to adopt them.
7. **Rules on Elections and Referenda.** John Warmington introduced the briefing paper which included proposals for the timing of various elections currently spread over the spring and summer terms. A number of issues were raised and the item was deferred for a more detailed paper to be brought to Council at the start of term.
8. **Officers' reports.** Each officer whose written report had been circulated to members was invited to give a brief introduction to their report. There were no questions to Becca Melhuish *Operations Officer*, or Indi Hicks *Welfare Officer*. James Hickie spoke to the *Activities Officer* report, and was asked about Olympic year activity. He said these will be events during week 6-10 showcasing Olympic sports not normally offered, there is no real connection with the London games. Indi also asked about making these activities inclusive and she would be happy to be involved perhaps including Kelly as diversity officer. Bobby Treweek asked about Activities Committee and James confirmed it will meet this term. Ariel Cohen spoke to the *Communications Officer* report, saying he had worked on outcome of the recent Members' Meeting and one day strike, also on the decision in support of the jailed student, as well as ways of increasing participation in union elections. Nad Williams asked what was the next step in supporting the jailed student? Ariel would like a working group to be set up. Issues included his situation with the university and his course during the period he is in prison, to ensure he will still be able to continue the course once released as well as ensuring he does not face increased fees if he is treated as returning after intermitting. Tom Bucher presented the *Community Engagement Officer* report, and answered a question about the idea of cookery workshops.
9. **National Student Survey 2012.** Becca Melhuish introduced this item and spoke to the paper circulated with the agenda. Two years ago the Union Council decided to urge students to 'boycott' the NSS in protest at the series of redundancies and cuts being introduced at that time; for the 2011 NSS the union adopted a neutral stance. The Survey is a useful tool as it allows students to give feedback on their experience as a Sussex student and the results are taken seriously by the University. The proposal was therefore that students should be encouraged to complete the NSS which will ensure the results are accurate and can be used as a campaign tool. David Cichon added that there is a question about satisfaction with Student Union services so the Union would like to get good feedback on that question, alongside the surveys the Union carries out locally (for all students not just final year UGs).

Catarina made the further point that as well as opposing the cuts the Union had been sceptical of the value of the range of league tables produced nationally, which use the NSS as a key component. If the

Union promoted participation it would have to be clear it does not condone the emphasis placed on league table positions.

Poppy Firmin said there are various views around the Union, for example among student reps there are different views about the value of the surveys and the emphasis on table positions, and the Schools themselves take different views on promoting NSS. We should not be afraid of students giving a low score to the University – or the Union.

Nad Williams was happy we were not proposing a boycott but would not wish the union to encourage participation. David pointed out the question on the Union was not the main reason for promoting NSS. It was ironic that there was concern about NSS as a marketing tool, since the survey was created out of an NUS request for more weight to be given to student views and results always provide good feedback and material to urge the University to improve things.

Tom and Indi also referred to the usefulness of student feedback, but there was a need to clarify what was meant by ‘encouraging’. Paul Newton pointed out that next year the Union will be putting together a Student Written Submission for the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) and last time in 2007 the NSS outcomes were an important source of evidence of student opinions. Poppy said the Union is stretched financially and should not devote a lot of resources to this ‘promotion’. Maya asked if the University would promote participation; the answer is that they always do. Becca considered encouraging participation should consist of making students aware of the NSS and its usefulness while not condoning the move towards marketization.

Catarina asked if the Union’s stance would have an impact on the position with the University e.g. over funding; David said it would be seen as part of the overall relationship rather than there being an explicit link. The University also has problems about the format of NSS but recognized the need to be involved with the process.

Poppy and David thought there could be a parallel campaign to see what students thought of the NSS and the questions, and if possible whether the Union might be able to influence which ‘optional’ questions were included.

Council agreed with the approach of encouraging students to engage with the NSS and adopt some of the suggestions around raising awareness of the uses made of NSS results.

**10. Banking arrangements for the Union.** Becca introduced the paper describing the proposed move from Barclays to Co-operative Bank and Council unanimously agreed to support this move.

**11. Any other business.** Members were asked to supply their timetables so that Council meetings can be fixed for next term.

James mentioned the question of nude calendars which had been the subject of a previous council decision and a working group had met but not completed a protocol for future use.

The meeting then closed.