

Student Council

Wednesday 30th October 2019, 6-8pm, Pleasance Theatre

Results

Paper	Votes For	Votes Against	Abstentions	Percentage in Favour
A: President's Report	63.5	6.5	6.5	90.7%
B: VP Activities' Report	71	2.5	3	96.6%
C: VP Community's Report	71	2.5	3	96.6%
D: VP Education's Report	72.5	1	3	98.6%
E: VP Welfare Report	68	5.5	3	92.5%
F: Single-use Plastics	73	1.5	3	97.9%
G: Rep Accountability	40.5	23.5	13.5	63.3%
H: Universal Credit	68.5	0	9	100%

Welcome from Facilitator, Amalie Sortland

Amalie welcomed everyone, explained the agenda for the evening, clarified some key terminology for Student Council, and reminded attendees of the Code of Conduct and Safe Space Policy.

Accountability: for full reports see [Paper A](#)

1. Stephanie Vallancey, VP Education

Q: Pre-submitted question: Will the Students' Association be organising and UCU strike solidarity like last year?

A: To give a bit of context, members of five of the major Higher Education Unions (including UCU who represent academic staff) have been voting in ballots on whether to take industrial action in response to concerns around staff pay and pensions. The results of these are likely to be known late this week, early next. We will have a clearer picture of whether action is going to take place, what it looks like, and when it will be, and what the impact of that might be on students. In 2018, Student Council passed policy mandating the Students' Association to support the strike action taking place at that particular time. While this policy is still live, it was created in the particular context of the 2018 strikes, so if industrial action does go ahead this academic year then we'll want to consult members/members may submit a motion on the specific situation this time around. Whatever happens, we will work with the University to ensure all students are fully aware of what action is planned, and how it might affect them.

Q: Pre-submitted question: What actions do you hope to take following the Personal Tutor review?

A: We have just finished the consultation process for the review with both staff and students. If you have participated in any way either in workshops or online feedback-thank you for contributing! Going forward the design group is developing a business case to present to the Universities Education Committee and Student Administration and Support Board. Once this is approved, we will be taking further steps into the implementation phase and ideally the new system will be embedded for the next academic year.

Q: Jeremy Pestle: The Student Staff Liason Committee (SSLC) meetings are currently twice per semester. Should the frequency of these change?

A: Guidance was passed in the summer on the structure and frequency of these meetings. This isn't policy, just guidelines so that University staff can find what works best for them. The main purpose of them is to look at the structure of the programme, rather than deal with micro issues.

Q: Daniel Mutie, International Students Representative: I also have a question about SSLC; I'm trying to understand what we mean by SSLC. These meetings already happen, and you say they'll be a safe space to talk about even non-academic issues. Are you talking about meetings between staff members and students or something different?

A: The SSLC is with staff and programme reps from all years. They're for discussing long and short term issues affecting the programme. Kings has a mega, college-wide one, which is a large-scale version of the programme level SSLC meetings.

Q: Sam Haynes, Biological Sciences Postgraduate School Representative: In terms of the course reviews and mid semester reviews, is there a central survey of which courses are and are not doing mid-semester reviews? I'm not sure that all of them are. Can we be told who is and isn't so that we can apply pressure locally?

A: These are currently compulsory for all undergraduate courses of ten weeks or more, and hopefully next year this will expand to include all masters courses.

Q: Nikitha Rajerdran, Engineering Postgraduate School Representative: Regarding the feedback system, the amount of feedback we are giving to professors isn't really changing them. We can bring up issues at SSLC, but at the moment there's just the feedback card system. Is it possible to improve this as soon as possible as people are becoming frustrated?

A: I'd be happy to catch up about this afterwards if that's okay!

2. Oona Miller, VP Welfare

Q: Pre-submitted question: Can we change 'sanitary products' marketing to 'menstrual products' please?

A: When the scheme launched, we were keen to use language like 'menstrual' or 'period' products. However, the Scottish Government guidance when the scheme was launched referred to sanitary products, and this shaped the University's marketing around the scheme. We recognise that the language of "sanitary" products contributes to the stigma around periods by suggesting they are unclean, so we'd be more than happy to pick this up with the University as they begin to review the scheme this year.

Q: Jeremy Pestle: There are regular meetings with VP Students – is this a new position, and, if so, what is the description of that role?

A: Sorry, I should have been clearer, VP is Vice Principal, which is a new role. He has been brought into the exec team to focus on student experience, which is why he was hired. He is scoping out student experience, with regular meetings with the sabbatical officers to get some context. There's been good recognition of the values we've been highlighting for a long time, which is really positive.

Q: Daniel Mutie, International Students Representative: Can you explain the BME bridging the gap thing again please?

A: I was talking about the attainment gap. I can't remember the exact statistic off the top of the head, but there's a difference in attainment, or awarded attainment, between white and BME students, I think it's roughly a 10% gap across the UK. There was a review which consulted students on this issue and pulled out a significant piece of work and want to address the issue specifically. You should have a look at the report, you can see the specifics of the recommendations there. It put the onus on academic staff to address the attainment gap, the recommendation being that they engage with the data around the attainment gap so they can address it in their area.

3. Rosheen Wallace, VP Community:

Q: Jeremy Pestle: I had a peak at the zero waste shop, and I love the concept. Are there any plans to bring it to Kings' Buildings?

A: There's no plans as of yet, but I'd love it! We need to see how it goes at DHT first. I really hope it goes well, and then we can look at expanding in the long term.

Q: Niki Stypiduo, (Deanery of) Biomedical Sciences Postgraduate School Representative: You said you're pushing for affordable accommodation, and I just wondered how you're going about this?

A: The main channel for this is through University Committees, like the Accommodation Progress Board and the Estates Committee. This is where Accommodation projects are discussed, and it's a case of sitting and saying that students care about affordable accommodation. It's a tricky one to be honest, keeping up the point in the meetings is hard when you're the only student in the room. I've also been meeting with people individually about this issue. Andrew will talk more about what he's doing as he's working on this issue too.

4. Beth Fellows, VP Activities and Services:

Q: Jeremy Pestle: On the project to get non-academic events into students' Outlook calendars, you haven't mentioned the response from Information Services, whether it's positive or negative. If it's positive, when will it come in?

A: I've had a really positive meeting about this. We are already drafting event descriptions and how they'd go into calendars. I would like them to be in effect by next semester, but I won't make any promises about this. They should be there by the student elections and LGBT History month. I know we've missed some history month already, but the calendar notifications should be running for the years going forward.

Q: Ophelia Tornyedzi, Engineering Undergraduate School Representative: In the School of Engineering our societies are very important to us, and are often part of our degrees as well. Do you have any plans to get students more involved?

A: Off the top of my head, I'm not sure. Can we talk afterwards? I'm coming down to Kings' to set up a day to engage at the Association, and there'll be a debrief on the Kings' Activities Fair soon. I'm aware that it's a vibrant community of students who we need to support, and who may have different needs.

Q: Maryam Binti Helmi Izham, International & Multicultural Activities Representative: For the interschool competition, why dodgeball? Is it campus specific? Will you involve every school?

I chose dodgeball because it seemed like fun, like something people may not have tried before, like something that's easy to play, you don't need much hand-eye coordination for it, it's not too serious. All 22 schools can enter, and it'll be in line with

induction when different schools had different coloured lanyards – schools can have t-shirts in the same colours. There'll be a cup or a prize at the end of it. It's winter, so dodgeball isn't weather dependent. Hopefully it's more accessible and inclusive too.

5. Andrew Wilson, President:

Q: Are there any plans for the Students' Association to pay Living Wage, like the University, rather than the minimum wage?

A: We do have aspiration and a plan to pay the Real Living Wage, this is currently unaffordable in one single year. We are progressively paying higher pay awards each year than the inflationary increase in minimum wage. We currently pay above minimum wage (for example for 18-20 year olds we pay £7.85 as opposed to the minimum wage of £6.15). However, for 21-25 year olds we only pay 15p more. We are currently considering how we can accelerate the move to pay the Real Living Wage to all staff faster than the plan we currently have, without too significant an impact on prices to students or services we offer. It's definitely our aspiration to do so. I am fully in favour of paying the living wage, and students expect it.

Q: Nathan Zou, Philosophy, Psychology & Language Sciences Undergraduate School Representative: Regarding 'Getting In and Getting On,' what will the student population look like in years to come? The university has expanded from 30,000 to 40,000 students, and PPLS has expanded once again, so much so that we're expanding out of the building. This growth is unsustainable, and to improve student satisfaction we need to curb growth. What's your stance on this?

A: I totally agree, we can't keep growing at an unachievable rate. I have raised these concerns, but I'm one voice in those meetings. The university won't grow for growth's sake, and focus instead on strategic growth. They want to make it so that talent gets people into the university above anything else. It's a real problem though: students can't find accommodation, the cost of living keeps going up, and transport won't cope with that many students. I have raised these points and will continue to challenge and champion the issue.

Q: Meyra Coban, Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer: According to the current plan, when will the Students' Association introduce the Living Wage?

A: The plan is reviewed annually by the trustees and agree pay rises according to that. We're balancing getting there with not impacting negatively on students by increasing prices. I can't specify a date, but I agree that we need to get there faster.

Q: Jeremy Pestle: Regarding the 'Money Matters' campaign, is there any scope for raising awareness of how to repay student finance and of how it works in the UK so that students can make wiser financial decisions post-graduation?

A: 'Money Matters' is a campaign that focusses on not just university but on being a human on a budget. I'm keen to hear your ideas as the campaign is evolving!

Q: Elaina Benson, Mature Students' Representative: Regarding the Strategic Plan for Student Experience, are there plans to include specific groups of students, such as mature students?

A: The Strategic Plan was decided last year under the last Sabbatical Team. There is an emphasis on how every student experiences university differently. I have fed into and reflected on this. There are 16 work streams, and so I'm sure some reflect different sections of students. I'm really keen to champion the fact that everyone experiences the university differently.

Q: Follow up question from Elaina Benson, Mature Students' Representative: Can you give us an approximate range for this?

A: It isn't helpful to give a specific date, but be assured that we review plans every year and your team push for it to be sooner. We can chat about this after if you like?

Motions: for full motions and amendments see [Papers B-F](#)

1. Create a sustainable alternative to plastic cups in the student bars and clubs

Speech For from the Proposer, Tamsin Wake:

The purpose of the motion is to get rid of single use plastics and create a sustainable alternative. It shocks me when I go out, especially at the Big Cheese there's plastic all over the floor and stairs. We all know how bad plastic is: 8million tonnes end up in the sea every year, and whales and other sea creatures get it in their stomachs. The university signed a Climate Emergency Letter to get behind the issue, so we should all support the motion.

2. Amendment to: Create a sustainable alternative to plastic cups in the student bars and clubs

Speech For from the Proposer, Ellen Blunsdon, Disabled Students' Officer:

Disabled people really rely on single use plastics. They're lightweight and hypoallergenic, and getting rid of them would prevent disabled students from using the university venues. The amendment is to remove unnecessary single use plastics, so they would remain in use and on display, with no questioning people who choose to use them. In searching for an alternative we must be mindful of disabled students, be considerate to them, and have accessible alternatives available without shame.

Questions:

Q: Catrinel Gheorghui, Clinical Sciences Postgraduate Representative: With single use plastic cups, are there paper alternatives like the cups we used tonight?

A: Proposer, Ellen Blunsdon, Disabled Students' Officer: There are issues with paper: it disintegrates fast, it can cause anaphylaxis for some people. The cups we have tonight have a plastic coating on the inside so they are non-recyclable. I haven't personally done a lot of research into alternatives to single use plastics, but I can't think of a better alternative. They're suitable for hot and cold beverages, they're hypoallergenic, lightweight. It would be great if we could find an alternative within budget, but I'm not sure that we will.

Q: Rebecca Rees, Geosciences Undergraduate School Representative: What would the definition of necessary/unnecessary be? How would this be used practically?

A: Proposer, Ellen Blunsdon, Disabled Students' Officer: That would be on a self-identifying basis, like we do with straws just now: plastic and paper straws are on display and you can choose yourself. We could also have staff ask customers what they'd like drink from, x, y or z. It's important that we have a zero tolerance policy to questioning people's decisions – people know their own access needs better than anyone else.

Q: Robyn Barclay: Does the Students' Association have a glass washer?

A: Andrew Wilson, President: We have glass washers, but not sufficient provision for if we used glass for everything.

A: Rosheen Wallace, VP Community: If we use reusable alternatives, we don't have things in place for dishwashers to go everywhere. If the motion passes we'd need to commit to doing that.

Speech Against: No appetite

Speech For:

I study chemistry, and we did a poly-chemistry course where we learned that it's not just about the plastic but what you do with it afterwards, like recycling. As someone who has a disability, I think people should have a choice, and we just need to think about what we do with it afterwards.

Speech Against: No appetite

Summation: Proposer, Ellen Blunsdon, Disabled Students' Officer

Vote for it please! It's important! Disabled people should always be recognised more than they are.

Hand vote and results:

For: 48

Against: 2

Abstain: 2

3. Amended motion to create a sustainable alternative to plastic cups in the student bars and clubs

Questions:

Q: David Renton, Part-time Students' Representative: You've talked about glass and plastic as if they are the only alternatives; what about vegware?

A: Andrew Wilson, President: The Association has to put waste through waste streams, and at the moment vegware goes through the same stream as plastic so it doesn't make a difference. For context, I'm in favour of the motion.

A: Proposer, Tamsin Wake: I'm happy with anything recyclable and biodegradable.

Q: Follow up from David Renton, Part-time Students' Representative: Surely that means we need to change the waste stream?

A: Rosheen Wallace, VP Community: These are valid points. All options need to be explored and whether we can improve. Currently, single use plastics go through recycling, but I'd welcome thoughts on this, it all needs consideration.

Speech Against: No appetite

Speech For: No appetite

Speech Against: No appetite

Summation: Proposer, Tamsin Wake

I just want to say that reducing single use plastics will be helpful in reducing harmful effects on the environment, and I hope you vote for this motion.

Students voted by ballot

4. Motion for elected officials' transparency and accountability

Speech For from the Proposer, Jordan Dowd, Activities Representative (Political):

This is a recurring issue which has come up from society officers with their constituents. People have no sense of what their representatives are doing and how they are voting. I researched what other universities do: at Cambridge and St Andrews for the past 5 or 6 years they have published all voting records and voting results online. It makes it easy for students and society officers to see what representatives are doing. The current white/yellow ballot system, where students vote on a white ballot for 1 vote and representatives vote on a yellow ballot for 1.5 votes, can be used to track rep votes. We think that this is democratic best practice, but also will engage more people in student council, for example by being more likely to contact their representatives.

5. Amendment to: Motion for elected officials' transparency and accountability

Speech For on behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Oona Miller:

I'll be brief. On behalf of the exec, which is made up of the Sabbatical Officers, we recognise the good principle behind the motion, it's good to hold people to account. It's also important to recognise the challenges of democracy in the past: controversial issues have left people feeling worse after a meeting and less likely to engage in the future. This amendment aims to keep the Safe Space Policy in mind, and clarify that data collection would be subject to research by the Representation and Democracy Team.

Questions:

Q: Jeremy Pestle: The amendment implies that implementation would not be possible in January 2020. Can you clarify when it would be implemented?

A: On behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Oona Miller: I hope that it didn't imply that, because I don't think that's the case. It's subject to the

Representation and Democracy Team decisions about how to conduct research. It would be implemented as fast as possible, but I won't promise a date right now.

Q: Ellen Blunsdon, Disabled Students' Officer: How would the Safe Space Policy apply to Liberation Officers when we are only accountable to our own groups? Why publish the voting records to everyone? How will we protect marginalised groups?

A: On behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Oona Miller: This is why the Safe Space Policy is mentioned, in recognition of these challenges, especially aggressive holding to account. There are particular challenges for Liberation Officers, and I hope that this amendment reflects this as the Safe Space Policy doesn't tolerate this sort of aggression. There are processes for disciplining violation of the safe space policy, which seems to be as much as we can do to protect people, but I'm willing to be corrected. Everyone has their own constituency, and Liberation Officers have groups who do need to hold them to account. The issue is how people do that, which will be subject to consultation by our trustworthy Representation and Democracy Team on how to keep representatives safe.

Q: David Renton, Part-time Students' Representative: I'd just like to raise the point that if we start keeping voting records this could disadvantage disabled students, part time students or student carers who may not always be able to attend Student Council and so would have worse voting records.

A: The Representation and Democracy Team would make it so that it wasn't a hindrance, but good point well made.

Speech Against: No appetite

Speech For: Jordan Dowd, Activities Representative (Political)

This is a good amendment, and I trust the Representation and Democracy Team to implement this in a timely way and in a way where accountability still happens in some form.

Speech Against: No appetite

Summation: Andrew Wilson, President:

To clarify, this amendment was submitted by the 5 Sabbatical Officers, we decided it together. All points and concerns are valid, and this amendment ensures consultation will be done to address these concerns, where it won't be done with the motion as it

stands. We need to allow time to consider all the points raised, so I'd ask you to support this motion.

Hand vote and results:

For: 52

Against: 1

Abstain: 5

6. Motion for elected officials' transparency and accountability

Questions:

Q: Meyra Coban, Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer: I recognise that the amendment touches on this already, but can the proposer clarify plans on how this information would be accessible? Will it be public or will students have to sign into their Students' Association account to access the information? How will it work for those who don't represent the whole student population?

A: Jordan Dowd, Activities Representative (Political): The overall vote results are currently published on the Students' Association website. We would publish voting records behind the MyEd log in, so they would only be available to students. This was not the case for how this was implemented at Cambridge or St Andrewes – they published all the information publicly online. This is not how we intend this to be implemented, we want the information to only be available for students. For those who don't represent everyone, we imagined that all students would be able to see all representatives' votes. Most positions are already out there, and people make manifesto promises, so accountability is important. Realistically, I think most people will be chilled and not aggressive.

Q: I want to understand publications – what happens to the records after they're published?

A: Jordan Dowd, Activities Representative (Political): Long story short, the intent is that you can see how all representatives are voting. If they're not voting on accessibility improvements, for example, and you want to know why, you would be able to ask your rep. It allows students to get involved directly with the people representing them, so they'll become more engaged. They'll also be able to see more easily who to ask about why motions didn't pass.

Speech Against: Meyra Coban, Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer:

I welcome the intentions of this motion and the amendment. However, the amendment is not strong enough for me to support the motion. I support the proposer working with the Representation and Democracy Team to account for the Liberation Officers in another motion, because we don't represent the whole student population and our job is to put ourselves out there – I don't want us to be put in an even more compromised position than we already are. I, as BME Officer, have had bad work with tabloids et cetera, all from publicly available information, showing that this could make the danger worse for Liberation Officers.

Speech For: No appetite

Speech Against: Martha Reilly, Women's Officer:

We are already held to account as Liberation Officers as our roles are very visible. 2 positions were not contested this year, showing that we are not supporting marginalised groups to put their head above the parapet, forums like this being one small way to make our voices heard. The Safe Space Policy doesn't account for a general feeling of hostility, so I wouldn't support this motion.

Summation: Jordan Dowd, Activities Representative (Political):

I am in favour of this motion. The purpose is fleshed out, the system is already in place at other universities. Regarding the problems with people being harassed, I recognize that there are people involved in student council activities who are racist, homophobic, transphobic, misogynist, et cetera, who create hostility towards reps around motions pertaining to social justice. But people who are hostile already realistically know the identities of student council members who promote social justice based on the minutes, candidate manifestos, and going to the meetings, so I don't think this rule change particular increases exposure to harassment, and in our research we did not find any incidents associated with the similar rule changes at St Andrews and Cambridge. I am confident that the Representation and Democracy Team would implement this in such a way that information would be available to students and people would be held to account in a safe way.

Students voted by ballot

7. Motion for supporting students impacted by universal credit

Speech For on behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Andrew Wilson:

This motion was brought forward by the Sabbatical Officers following campaigns from other student unions. The Students' Association is a charity and so can only campaign

on issues affecting students. Universal Credit has a disproportionate impact on students. It combines several benefits payments and tax credits into one lump sum which is paid once per month. The old benefits system did not include student income, but universal credit does, and deducts payments pound for pound for student finance, whereas earned income is deducted at 63 pence per pound. We should work with NUS Scotland and others to lobby the government on this issue.

Questions

Q: Meyra Coban, Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Officer: Are there any plans for monetary support or is this just a lobbying motion?

A: On behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Andrew Wilson: The campaign could consider this. It aims to make structural change coming from the top down, but the Advice Place already gives constant support including monetary support. But, yes, this could form part of the campaign.

Speech Against: No appetite

Speech For: Jeremy Pestle

This is symbolic motion by the Association to make it clear that students are disproportionately affected by changes in a benefits system which aims to squeeze the pockets of the disadvantaged as they attempt to go into a better stage of life. Anything the Association can do to show that universal credit is terrible has to be supported 100%.

Speech Against: No appetite

Summation: On behalf of the Proposer, The Executive Committee, Andrew Wilson:

This echoes what unions are all about: fighting for students and recognising when they are affected. Go get the government!

Students voted by ballot

Any Other Business

There was not enough time for AOB during the meeting, so we have emailed the following to all Representatives:

Diego Rates, PhD Student, School of Education would like to invite all UG Programme Reps to a 30-60 minute interview to inform the design of prototypes of Applications for Student Reps. If you would be interested to participate, please send him an email at diego.rates@ed.ac.uk to give you more details and coordinate

VP Activities, Beth Fellows:

Student Association catering outlets

She will be running a focus group in the near future to gather student feedback on our catering outlets such as in KB House at King's and Teviot including New Amphion, Library Bar, and Sports Bar, what students like and dislike about them and how we could improve the service we offer to students. Please contact VP Activities if you are interested.

Wednesday afternoon survey

An email went out on Monday/Tuesday this week from the VP activities email address to fill in a survey regarding how you currently spend your Wednesday afternoon. The survey closes this Friday so if you have not filled it out already please do so, it literally takes 2 minutes max but is really important we get as much student feedback on this policy as possible.