

MINUTES

Annual General Meeting

Date: Thursday 18th April 2024, 12:00 – 15:00pm

Location: Venue and Teams

1. **Attendance and Apologies:** No apologies received.

135 members in attendance: 72 online, 63 in person.

2. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

Minutes approved.

3. **Matters Arising - Student Voice – Led by Alkhemy**

Updates on progress with the democratic review.

Work to Date:

- Research, conversations and meetings with SU staff and officers.
- Modern democracy workshopping with SU team.
- Co-creating new structures with Brunel students.

Student feedback:

- Elections seem pointless and are mostly a popularity contest, and elected officials don't seem to implement anything they promised.
- Set up an additional seat for all exiting officer roles so more than one person represents voices on topics.
- Elected officials don't necessarily interact with students; students have to seek them out.

6 key themes from student feedback:

- Scrutiny: holding representatives accountable.
- Vetting: getting the best candidates for students to choose from.
- Awareness: making sure students have all the info they need.
- Fairness: making sure elections are free and fair.
- Timings: making sure elections and meetings take place at the best time for students.
- Access: making it as easy as possible to contact and get involved with the SU.

Scrutiny and vetting proposals:

- **Vetting:** Candidates would be asked to take part in an interview type process; interviews would be designed to ensure that the candidate meets certain criteria, such as being a student in good standing and who is aware of what the role entails. Interview panel would consist of key SU staff, SU trustees, randomly selected students, and overseen by an external facilitator to ensure fairness and neutrality. Passing vetting would then allow a candidate to appear on the ballot.
- **Why vetting:** One of the main things students are asking for. Students want to be assured of certain things before candidates reach the ballot; that they understand the

role and what it means to represent students. The process would involve a wide range of stakeholders, including externals, ensuring it's totally fair.

- **Scrutiny:** Elected officers would take part in mandatory 'votes of confidence' throughout the year. These could occur 2 or 3 times per academic year and would be used to measure student satisfaction with the work of officers. Officers would be invited to present their work to date on their manifestos and other projects and students would be asked if they have confidence in that officer. Depending on the outcome of the vote, certain conditions might be applied to the officer in question.
- 60%+ Confidence: No conditions
30% - 59% Confidence: Scrutiny panel objectives set
Less than 30% Confidence: By-Election triggered

Vetting Feedback from AGM Members:

- Bureaucrats shouldn't decide who can and cannot run. This will make it even more difficult for outsiders.
- This will lower participation and insert more unnecessary bureaucracy and expenditure into the process.
- Someone standing for elections should have a minimum understanding of what it's like to be a leader. Interviews are necessary, it should be about work, not popularity.
- The measure seems anti-democratic and filtering candidates to certain qualifications feels like a form of censorship. While it seems good in theory, we must consider broader implications.
- Would there be a separate/different process for voted officers who have had serious complaints made against them? Will this stop them from being voted in?
- I think it's a good idea but seems unnecessary if the candidate is only there for 1 academic year.
- Easier to criticise than to do, a good applicant may perform poorly in front of a panel of students but otherwise be a good candidate.
- Most students feel entirely disconnected from the democratic process and don't even know who they're voting for and what they represent. This process gives the opportunity for actual discussion.

Scrutiny Feedback from AGM Members:

- What stops possible candidates in by-elections from campaigning for voting against an officer?
- Poor turnout to a vote could result in the kick of a good candidate.
- I believe this is necessary to hold officers accountable to their respective goals and campaign promises.
- How would these be publicised to the student body?
- Once a year would be a better amount rather than 2-3 times a year.
- I believe there are already feedback places to hold officers accountable, students just don't care to show up and prove their opinions or keep in touch with what officers are doing.
- You would have to turn a possible 2% lead in an election into 60%+ people voting for you.
- Students have a continuous say in representation, not just one time and then their voices aren't heard.
- Communication needs to be better for this to work and methods of engaging everyday students.

4. Motions to revoke or amend the Constitution or Bye-Laws

No motions to be revoked.

5. Motions

No motions.

6. Student Matters - Meet the 24/25 officers – Discussion/Questions

Officers introduced:

- Vishal Parihar – Education and Welfare Officer for CBASS
- Zachary Balberchak – LGBTQ+ Officer
- Jacob Payne – Disabled Students Officer

No questions for new or current officers.

7. Trustee Report - Presented by Chair of Trustees.

(Note: Lost quoracy so won't be able to vote on anything.)

Key highlights from documents:

July 2023 (last financial year)

Income generated: £3,750, 235

Expenditures: £3,219,136

- Trustees have said there needs to be an element of a reserve.
- Suffered so greatly financially last year due to an unprecedented inflation period.
- Pension deficit (relates to scheme that is now dormant): £2.2 million.
- Try and replenish reserve we'd had to dip into the last 2 years.

Trustee Report approved.

8. Student Assembly Report

Presented by Student Assembly Chair/Vice chair.

Autumn 2023 elections:

- Filled 8 of 15 assembly department rep roles.
- Elected 15 student assembly community members, PG Officer and EU Officer.
- Number of voters: 1,896.

No nominations were received for the following departments:

- Civil and Environmental Engineering
- Mathematics
- Arts and Humanities
- Chemical Engineering
- Education
- Health Sciences
- Social and Political Sciences
- Mature and Part-Time Students

Democratic Policy:

Since last AGM, student assembly have received and vote and two motions to change by laws. A motion to remove by-laws O and N and to approve two new Union processing documents to replace the complaints and disciplinary processes, along with a motion to reintroduce a part-time Women's Officer role.

In regards to the motion to reintroduce a part-time Women's Officer, the Union noted that previously union had 4 part time liberation officers which include Disabled Students Officer, Women's Officer, BME Officer, and LGBTQ+ Officer. At the AGM in Jan 2022 a motion was passed by members to change the name of Women's Officer to Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Officer, a role that any member would be able to apply for. The name change was not introduced in 2022 due to imminent 2022 spring elections. The change was implemented for spring elections 2023 and a Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Officer was elected in March 2023.

Women are not well-represented in Union democratic processes. In the 2023 spring elections, there were 1,347 male voters, compared to 652 female voters. Rather than replacing the Women's Officer to cover underrepresented communities who don't have sufficient representation, there is a need for 2 roles. There would be a Women's Officer and Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Officer that would work closely with each other and the LGBTQ+ Officer.

Democratic Decision-Making:

Student assembly have voted on:

- Vote to ratify independent trustees
- Vote to approve NUS as the returning officer
- Vote to approve election rule changes for spring 2024 elections
- Vote to agree election rules for spring 2024 elections
- Vote to approve election rule changes for spring 2024 elections
- Vote to agree changes to officer JD's

Security Operations Manager Andrew Singh was invited to attend Student Assembly to discuss concerns members had about their safety on campus. Associate Pro Vice Chancellor Amanda Harvey also attended to seek feedback on the university's access and participation plan.

This year we have offered student assembly as a hybrid set-up to accommodate all members. We will continue to review whether this is still needed or appropriate.

Report approved.

9. Union Accounts and Budget

Presented by the Chief Executive.

Covered in Point 7 along with Trustee report.

10. Executive Committee Report

Presented by the Officers.

Community Living:

- Praying spaces letter draft was sent to DVC to get more prayer spaces and more bible studies. Have yet to hear back from DVC.
- Attended Council Away Day to formulate 10 Year Strategic Plan and discuss KPIs for all colleges.
- Organised first Izzy Sports Day to engage with students in non-professional manner.
- Lead on One Brunel Event: Holi
- Coming up: Pongathon and Fashion/Talent Show

Education and Welfare (CBASS):

- Implemented more Halal and South Asian food on campus
- Chosen for academic misconducts – ¾ academic misconducts per week
- Multi-language counsel on-campus for students who are unable to communicate in English
- Collaborating with PDC and Brunel Business School for upcoming LinkedIn event
- Rep Congress coming up
- BPC organising an alumni event with guest speakers
- Fashion/Talent show coming up
- Alcohol and Drug Free Week – collaborated with Venue to have mocktails and alcohol-free drinks

Education and Welfare Officer (CHMLS):

- Started EDI student forum in CHMLS to increase communication between officers and students
- Accreditation campaign: CHMLS looking into courses that don't have accreditation; some courses have received accreditation
- Introduced placement opportunities and volunteer opportunities
- Updated books campaign: worked with library to update all books on certain courses
- Improved course rep engagement in CHMLS – introduced Unitu, attend classes and try and get new course reps
- Communication Skills Workshop in collaboration with Entrepreneurs Society
- Mental Health Campaign coming up
- Fashion/Talent show coming up

Education and Welfare Officer (CEDPS):

- Collaboration event with Innovia, Art Society and Civil Engineering Society to re-activate them
- Attended Council Away Dy to formulate 10 Year Strategic Plan and discuss KPI's
- Hackathon Event coming up
- Prep for Blockchain and Trading Event
- Canada Conference to address global challenges
- Rep Congress
- Fashion/Talen Show coming up

EU Officer:

not present, presentation done by Maria Bamgbele

- Chair of Law Society
- Making plans for next year

Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Officer

not present, presentation done by Maria Bamgbele

- Took on Period@Brunel University London introduced sustainable period products in the form of menstrual cups

No presentations done for:

- PG Officer
- Disabled Students Officer
- International Students Officer
- LGBTQ+ Officer

AGM member asked officers for a space like the Meeting House, possibly in Michael Stirling, to have events, and officer suggested emailing them and that they would put the member in touch with the right people to instigate the process.

AGM member expressed how difficult it can be to book rooms for societies. Officers responded that sometimes other seasonal events can interfere, and recommended booking a minimum of one month before the society event will take place. Officers also recommended getting in touch with Darcy, who organises events for the Union, and stressed they understand the importance of organising events, especially cultural events, and that those should be given priority.

AGM member asked what work the officers do. Officers expressed they don't work with students they work to represent them and to gather feedback to bring to higher-ups. Craig responds that information about the officers is available on the website. AGM member expresses that officers seem like they only record videos and that they're ineffective. Craig responds that officers are not there to be individual advocates for each student, but to be representatives, gather views, ensure the student perspective is put forward and ensure that the experience provided is the best it can be.

AGM member expresses the AGM meeting should be a necessity in response to several officers not attending. Officers agree and state it's every officers' personal responsibility to attend. Craig suggests student organise a motion with the officers that will mandate attendance.

11. Affiliations

Presented by the Chief Executive.

The purpose of this is so members are aware of organisations we affiliate to. There is significant cost with some of them. The biggest one is the NUS which offers different kinds of support to student unions and students. The second biggest one is the British Universities and Colleges Sport, which enables us to enter all of our sports teams into university competitions. The rest are affiliations to specific sporting federations.

12. Honorary Memberships

Offers a title, recognition, and allows honourees to attend AGMs. A standard policy agreed Feb 2020 to automatically offer membership to certain categories that include:

- Full time officers that have served in the organisation.
- Trustees that have finished their term in office.
- Staff members that have left after term, of up to 5 years.

Members have opportunity to nominate people for a membership at AGM.
Those with memberships:

- Archan Raval – Served two full terms as a Sabbatical Officer
- Dawn Moss – Served over 5 years as a staff member
- Andy Proudfoot – Served over 5 years as a staff member
- Nathan Townsend – Served two full terms as an Independent Trustee
- Mohammed Khalifa – Served two full terms as Student Trustee
- Katie Risebrow – Served one full term as an Independent Trustee

Recommended, but will not come into force until their current membership ends:

- Wiktoria Swoboda – Served two full terms as a Sabbatical Officer

13. AGM reform – Discussion – led by Alkhemy

AGM members expressed they feel the way the AGM is run currently is unengaging, too long and monotonous, but also useful, eye opening, and necessary. Topics they want discussed include finance, societies, campaigns, facilities, mental health, and plans of action and for next year. They stated they want to know what work the officers are doing compared to their manifesto promises, how they're planning to improve in their roles, and how to get more face-to-face support from them.

Members asked for more methods for the officers to engage with students and communicate university structures better due to a general feel of disconnect. They also want to hear how officers adapt their plans to changes within the university and what correspondence they have with the university. Members state that incentives like pizza and prize draws influenced them to attend, as well as wanting to understand the university more, it being mandatory, curiosity, supporting friends, sharing concerns, and meeting the officers.

Members expressed that making the AGM not as long, including more interactive things and ice breaker activities, receiving more details, better statement from elected reps, more attendance from officers, and receiving information in a less monotone way but instead in a bullet point presentation highlighting key information would make AGM more exciting for them. Their preference for the best way to hear about the AGM is Instagram, and they'd prefer it to be a hybrid meeting at the beginning of semester 2. Other feedback included that there should be action taken against no-show officers, drinks served with the pizzas, effective mics and speakers, doing the AGM in a lecture theatre, and creating more structured opportunities to meet the officers to ask or raise concerns.