

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD STUDENTS' UNION

WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2011

AS THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING WAS INQUORATE, THE FOLLOWING MINUTES ARE PURELY A RECORD OF THE PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS WHICH TOOK PLACE.

1. Welcome from the Union President

Ricky Chotai welcomed attendees to the meeting and announced that as the meeting was not quorate, no business could be transacted, including any debate on motions or policy. The Sabbatical Officer team were introduced.

2. Guest speaker: Ed Marsh, Vice President Union Development, National Union of Students

Ed Marsh (EM) began by thanking the students for inviting him to speak. He expressed the view that Salford Students' Union is at the cutting edge of students' unions nationally, due to the clear representative sabbatical structure in place.

EM summarised the last six months as a period of 'taking a kicking' for students, commenting on the rise in tuition fees, Higher Education funding cuts, scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowance and the cap on international recruitment. Reflecting on his own degree-choice decision, EM gave the example of the right-wing media's attacks on 'media studies' degrees and the way this view on 'worthless' subjects has become prevalent and illustrates that current government decisions on Higher Education funding are ideologically, rather than financially driven.

EM expressed his disappointment and anger at the part the Liberal Democrats have played in decision making on the Comprehensive Spending Review. He emphasised the importance of NUS' 'Vote for Students' campaign before the general election, and the well publicised pledges signed by many Lib Dem candidates. If all who had pledged to had voted against the fee rise, the decision would have been reversed. EM also noted the way that Vice Chancellors supported raising the cap on tuition fees, assuming that this would mean extra funding for universities, only to be faced with the prospect of deep cuts which would only just be replaced by fee rises.

A debate about the public good of education needs to be had in both higher and further education. EM commented on the fact that by 2013, there will be more students in the 16/17year age range than ever before, but no extra funding allocated to accommodate them.

EM remarked that in the coming years, students will become more consumerist, expecting value for money, and becoming more demanding of both their institutions and students' unions. For example students may not want to pay to join sports clubs, go on trips etc. We can't afford for students to lose faith in their students' unions or the national movement.

Questions from students

- a. A question was posed about NUS' view on the marketisation of Higher Education. The student drew attention to recent media coverage of Aaron Porter using market-driven language, and discussing possible legal action by students against their institutions.**

EM replied by emphasising NUS' opposition to the marketisation of HE and the consumerisation of students. However, the government policies are clearly ideological in nature, and using the language of markets may be needed in order to enter the debate. EM also commented that students as consumers, and the concept of 'value for money' really

scares Vice Chancellors, and therefore it may be necessary for students' unions to use this language in order to ensure the best experience for their students.

b. Are NUS supporting the demonstration planned for 26 March?

EM replied that yes, NUS are supporting the demo in March, and emphasised that this would follow consultation on the white paper. Students were the first group to publicly protest at the government cuts, but as time goes on there will be more and more groups affected who will choose to demonstrate.

c. A question was posed about cuts in other publicly funded areas, like the NHS and the military. What makes education so special and in need of protection from cuts in comparison to these?

EM replied that it was not helpful to pit services against each other. Higher Education does not bring in any funds upfront, and a large proportion of student debt is never repaid, is therefore 'dead money' and can't help the country's deficit.

d. A comment was made about other student campaigning groups who have moved away from, and against NUS. What is being done to bring these groups together and reunite the movement?

EM stated that the student movement has never been 'one big happy family' and that as a central body by nature, there are some things that NUS can not do. EM commented that different groups are able to accomplish different things. While smaller, flexible campaigning groups are able to organise marches/demonstrations at short notice without fear of future litigation etc, they are not able to engage in consultation with the government on the white paper, or provide fully detailed, costed responses. This is something that only NUS are able to do. It is important for groups to work together to complement each other, not work in opposition.

e. A student commented on the scrapping of Education Maintenance Allowance, and also raised the issue of the administration of student funding.

EM described the decision to scrap EMA as 'disastrous' and drew attention to the flawed study which led to the government's decision. The study sample was 90% white, despite the fact that non-white students account for 40% of EMA recipients. NUS are working closely with Simon Hughes on plans for alternatives to EMA.

EM agreed that the administration of student funding had been flawed in the past, and anticipated that it would likely get worse due to cuts in central administration budgets. It is also likely to take a few years for the system to 'get to grips' with the new finance arrangements.

f. A question was posed about NUS' position on University staff industrial action. The student noted that UCU has now taken the decision to ballot its members.

EM stated that on a personal level, and from NUS' perspective, industrial action by members of staff in HE was justified. He emphasised the need for all in HE to stand together, students and staff members alike, in order to fight the cuts.

However, EM noted that there are various forms of industrial action, some which can have major impacts on students, and some less so. An example was given of the refusal to complete RAE applications, which would be detrimental to the institution but not directly impact the students. If there is likely to be action which will negatively affect students, it will be up to individual students' unions to decide their position, which should be taken in a democratic manner.

3. Report of the Trustees

Ricky Chotai (RC) presented a report outlining the achievements and operations of the Union for the year 2009/10.

[CLICK HERE](#) for a full copy of the presentation.

The Future: RC commented that while the Union had been fortunate in its grant allocation from the University in recent years, there had been no guarantee about future grant levels. The Union is therefore looking at the sustainability of services, and is currently consulting with student activity groups about alternative ways of funding.

RC echoed Ed Marsh's speech by commenting on potential industrial action taken by University staff, and the importance of the decision whether to support it. RC emphasised that democratic procedures were essential in ensuring that decisions are not made solely by the five Sabbatical Officers. It is therefore vital that as many students stand and vote in the upcoming elections as possible. High voter turnout will demonstrate to the University that the Union is relevant and representative, and can have more influence over the University's decision making.

RC mentioned the reintroduction of student Council, and the way that this will aid decision making at the Union.

Questions to the trustees

- a. A question was asked about the decision to restructure the sabbatical officer team next year, from four to three Vice Presidents.**

The University restructure has meant that the four faculties, for which there is a Vice President each, have now become three colleges.

RC replied that there were three options presented to the Trustee Board: for the Sabbatical Officer team to remain the same despite the University restructure, for the 'extra' Sabbatical Officer to act as a deputy president, or for the team to reduce to four Sabbatical Officers, a President and three Vice Presidents. The board decided to restructure, but this decision will be reviewed in two years.

- b. A question was asked about the funding cuts, and how the Union would keep costs down in terms of staffing.**

RC replied that AGM was not the appropriate place to discuss staffing issues, but emphasised that the Union ensures every penny it receives in income is used to make students' lives better, and that this would always continue. RC also commented on issues surrounding pensions, and the impact this has on the accounts.

- c. A student requested more information about the new Student Council**

RC summarised the role and structure of Council. There will be 22 Council members, 15 elected by cross-campus ballot and a further six drawn from particular groups e.g. LGBT, Mature, Postgraduate etc. It is anticipated that Council will meet 4-6 times a year and will discuss motions that can be submitted by any student. RC emphasised that the existence of Council will ensure that more students are involved in the Union's decision making processes.

- d. A student expressed their view that if AGM is not quorate meaning that motions can not be debated, and Council is not yet up and running, where can students discuss issues and influence Union policy?**

RC stated that as a Sabbatical Officer team, they are bound by the constitution which was overwhelmingly accepted at a referendum last year.

RC did accept that a forum for debate could be arranged in the form of a 'You Decide' meeting to be held before the first Council meeting, though he emphasised that this was not a policy-making meeting.

- e. **A further comment relating to the previous question was made about the current lack of a democratic forum.**

RC reiterated that the Union is bound by its' constitution, and that the new Council would allow all students to be involved in debating and setting policy.

- f. **A student began by stating that the new Council was a good idea, and was widely welcomed. A question was posed about the transparency of the Sabbatical Officer salaries and expenses.**

RC replied that Sabbatical salaries have always been publicly available, and are currently published on the Union website. There is currently no publication of expenses, but RC is happy to discuss this at the next Trustee Board meeting with a view to publishing them online.

4. Education Campaign: The Salford Bill of Student Rights

Vice Presidents Caroline Dangerfield and Christabel Brown launched 'The Salford Bill of Student Rights', a document outlining seven areas of educational experience which need improvement at Salford. The areas are: hidden course costs, feedback and assessment, careers advice, representation, learning resources, academic practice and timetabling.

The full document and further information about the campaign can be viewed [HERE](#).

A set of colourful boxes labelled with each of the seven areas was placed at the front of the hall, and all attendees invited to place a token in one of the boxes to indicate their view of the priority area. The boxes will be placed in Yours Bar at University House for two weeks, and along with an online survey will be used to determine the starting point of the campaign for the sabbatical team.

5. National Student Survey

Vice President Maros Kravec reminded attendees that final year students should complete the National Student Survey in the next few weeks. The information gathered by the survey helps both the University and the Union to highlight strengths and weaknesses.

As there was no further business Ricky Chotai thanked members for attending and declared the meeting closed.