

minutes

Meeting:	Postgraduate Assembly
Date:	30 th October 2018
Paper:	Postgraduate Assembly Autumn 18 – 3 (PGAA300)
Author:	Alexandros Efstratiou
Purpose:	Record of Decision Making

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Minutes of the Postgraduate Assembly 30th October 2018

Assembly members present: Martin Marko (Postgraduate Education Officer), Matthew Gallagher (PPL), Tim Barker (PPL), Charlotte Hallahan (LDC), Jonathan Middleton (HIS), Ruth Flaherty (LAW), Briony Hannell (PPL), Nancy Agrawal (NBS), James McLean (AMA), Saras Mathur (LAW), Ben Pinsent (AMA), Radoslaw Wincza (PSY), Craig Adlard (ENV), Mireille Abate (LAW), Saket Jalan (NBS), Anurag Bonde (CMP), Trishala Sanyal (LAW)

Chair: Anush Rajagopal (LAW)

Apologies:

In attendance: Alexandros Efstratiou (Advocacy Assistant), Lewis Martin (Chair of Democratic Procedures Committee)

PGAA301 Introduction to Assembly & Apologies

-The chair of assembly issues their apologies for not conducting the last assembly in the best manner given the tension that arose, and opens for the Postgraduate Education Officer's statement.

-MM also issues their apology, particularly for filing the motion at the last assembly, and they state that they did not intend on it having the impact that it did. They apologise to students present at the assembly, and particularly to the members of committee.

-AR requests any comments on this, and states that they would like to close this issue in order to move forward with other pending items on the agenda.

-LM asks whether the Postgraduate Education Officer will also be apologising to Union Council, as a recommendation from the Democratic Procedures Committee.

-MM states that they should.

-LM states that they should use Microsoft Teams to put any apology they want to bring to Council through the committee.

-MG asks what can be done moving forward to make the assembly work more effectively.

-AR states that they have requested to be trained further by staff, as they were unprepared to tackle a situation like the one that transpired at previous assembly. They also state that, using their discretion as chair, they will attempt to stop conversations that disrupt more constructive discussions. They ask the assembly for any further suggestions on this.

-MG states that the motion should have been ruled out of order as it was dangerous to the union as a whole. They question the chair whether such training would suffice to prevent similar situations.

-AR states that this would be the basis of the training, as they are still unclear as to whether the motion should have been ruled out of order or not. They further state that there are no clear bye-laws to act as guidelines for this, and they explain that this training would pertain to a better understanding of all the laws involved to close this comprehensive gap.

-An assembly member asks what the outcomes of the motion have been, specifically around whether the motion still stands or if it has been rectified, since these procedures are invisible to members of assembly and are not stated in minutes.

-MM asks whether the minutes of the last committee meeting have been made available online.

-The assembly member states that they are specifically referring to the appropriateness of the motion.

-MM explains that these issues were discussed in the last committee meeting, and asks AE whether the minutes of this meeting are online. An assembly member states that they are not yet online.

-AR states that there are two committee members present at assembly, other than themselves, and call upon them to give an idea of what transpired at the committee meeting.

-The assembly member clarifies that their question regarded the outcomes of the motion and what will be done going forward, as the motion was not accepted and there were a lot of arguments against it.

-MM states that they are not entirely sure, and that the motion was a result of some reservations they had regarding how they ran the first assembly. Making reference to a policy that was passed last year, they state that the main question is what pg(su) does for both PGRs and PGTs, which will be tackled by research mandated through this policy. MM further states that they will be looking into securing dedicated spaces for both PGRs and PGTs.

-An assembly member states that a very striking feature of the motion was that it did not mention the fact that the majority of PGR students have also done PGT programmes, and this should have been emphasized so as to avoid a dichotomy between PGRs and PGTs. They add that PGRs can understand aspects of PGT life, while PGTs cannot necessarily speak for PGRs in the same way, and the motion omitting this fact was misleading.

-MM states that this was one of the issues that was raised at the postgraduate committee, and, while they understand that PGRs have a holistic postgraduate experience, some more current issues may be specific to PGTs. They state that, at present, they are trying to determine the best possible way to represent the two groups.

-MG states that the chair of assembly committed to bringing a report from the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) on the processes of the elections and on whether anything went wrong, and they ask for any updates on the matter.

-AR states that, while they do not have updates from the DRO, they were present at the committee meeting where a member of the Democratic Procedures Committee (DPC) outlined the issues

with last assembly's motion. AR asks the member, who is also present at the assembly, to reiterate some of these issues.

-LM states that they can comment on the motion, but not the elections themselves, as DPC has no control over elections. They go on to explain that this was mostly an issue of best practice, for example AR did agree to bring a report as can be seen from the minutes, and they state that the chair can receive direction from staff within the SU.

Part of this discussion has been removed due to the breach of Union Staff Protocol.

-MG inquires whether the report can be brought in at the next assembly. AR states that it will be.

-TB explains that they were not present at the previous assembly, however they were shocked by the motion and therefore have some questions. They state that, going forward for next year, it would be good to have an explanation of the assembly and its role as a point of accountability. They go on to ask MM why the motion was framed as a motion of no confidence, understanding that their issues were with the election process, not individual committee members. They also state that, with regards to the PGR and PGT aspects of the motion, PGRs usually struggle to get positions on postgraduate representative bodies, especially due to their lower numbers. With regards to this, they ask MM why they thought it was appropriate to suggest that PGRs had an unfair advantage in the elections.

-MM states that they incorporated the PGT and PGR aspects of the motion because it could be seen that elections could potentially advantage PGRs, and the motion of no confidence stemmed from the fact that they did not have time to prepare appropriately for the elections. They state that it was wrong not to consider the people involved, however for the sake of efficiency, they believed the best way to address this was to simply re-run the whole process.

-TB states that, even though they disagree, they can understand some of the issues that MM had with the election. However, they state that attempting to no-confidence individuals on the basis that there are too many PGRs versus PGTs goes against all the work that the previous year's committee did towards cohesion, with TB being a PGT member on it. They state that PGRs often felt that they did not belong in the room when it came to postgraduate representation, and while the previous year's committee did a lot of work to alleviate this, this action almost reversed all that work. TB states that they expect MM to try and fix this damage, and get to the bottom of this dissatisfaction.

-An assembly member states that, as a PGR student, this action makes them feel alienated from the students' union, especially after the work that has been done. They state that policy has been passed which mandates pg(su) to engage with PGRs, and at the same time the Courage Project is partially funded by the students' union, which stems from the significant issues with PGR mental health. They go on to explain that filing a motion of no confidence against committee members simply on the basis of their study level is quite symbolic, as it makes them feel alienated from the students' union and the democratic structures that have been established to give them a voice.

-RF seconds this statement.

-MM states that they did not consider things in that respect, however that was not the way that they saw things. They state that they simply believed that PGRs have an advantage over PG elections as they are at the university for longer, and therefore are more familiar with the democratic structures. MM explains that, in hindsight, they should have considered PGRs alongside PGTs.

-RF observes that both AR and MM stated that they did not consider some things. They ask for feedback on any issues with their training, as there were obvious failings with their understanding of the postgraduate body as a whole.

-AR states that they felt their training was quite basic, and the only point that they took away was that they are simply the facilitator of discussions at the assembly. They state that, in the future, it would be beneficial to have training on analytical approaches to specific scenarios, for example, in the case of a motion like the one at the previous assembly.

-MM states that they did not go through what happens when the year starts with the previous Postgraduate Education Officer, and that when the time of the first assembly came, they were unsure about how to run the election process.

-RF explains that they are not specifically talking about such issues, but rather their understanding of postgraduate issues and policies relevant to pg(su).

-Another assembly member states that this is fundamental to the officer's role, and they are lead to believe that MM was not briefed on the struggles that previous Postgraduate Education Officers have had in engaging PGRs and the significant amount of work that has been done.

-MM states that they do not recall this being prominent in their handover documents.

-The assembly member states that this is mandated by the Courage Project and other students' union policy. They go on to say that it is the Postgraduate Education Officer's role to inform themselves on these issues.

-TB suggests listening to the voice of postgraduate students in what they want the Postgraduate Education Officer to do. They state that this would be useful for both the current officer and the next officer in the handover. TB suggests gathering a few PGTs and PGRs in a room to work on the ethos of the postgraduate assembly and pg(su) in general, in order to mend broken pathways and determine what specifically needs to be handed over.

-AR states that the assembly can be used as a space to do this.

-MG states that the assembly is not meant to be so much of a discussion body, but rather a decision-making body which acts as a medium of passing policy to the SU through the postgraduate body. They make reference to the present assembly's agenda items around discussion of events, and they state that, while this is fine, the bye-laws specify something different. They state that it is fine if the chair wishes to create focus groups for feedback on these matters, however that is not why assembly members are there. They further state that they are happy to incorporate some discussion elements in the assembly, however the assembly exists primarily for passing motions, and the main question at the moment is what the Postgraduate Education Officer will do to amend the damage that has been done.

-TB states that they would like to see the committee work with the Postgraduate Education Officer to determine the nature and structure of the focus groups, and they state that, while the assembly is a good body to discuss things, they agree that it might not be the best place to hold this if the aim is to create a handover document.

-An assembly member states that if MM cannot write the document themselves they can request support.

-MG asks whether they can expect a motion from MM around outlining the assembly.

-TB mentions that the next committee should meet before the next assembly, and states that this would be a good opportunity to determine who wants to propose such a motion and bring it back to the assembly to present it.

-AR states that this can definitely be brought to the committee, and asks for any other comments.

-MG states that the parties involved accepted the criticism for the motion and that is respectable, however they express concern that it was an emergency motion that was actively kept hidden until the assembly. They state that the way the motion was raised showed an element of attempting to disguise it, and they ask whether that was an intent.

Part of this discussion has been removed due to the breach of Union Staff Protocol.

-LM asks AR who told them not to share the motion with the assembly beforehand.

-AR states that the proposer did.

-LM explains that they are a member of the DPC, and that requesting that the motion was not disclosed is wrong. They state that such an action could constitute grounds for the committee to no confidence the Postgraduate Education Officer, since it is not their capacity to tell the chair how to run the assembly. They recall that MM stated numerous times that they do not understand how democratic procedures are run, however they sat on Union Council last year, where they saw how motions are written and also submitted motions, meaning that they are aware of that process. LM expresses extreme concern, as they state that the officer bypassed best practice, protocols and other provisions by telling the chair not to disclose the motion because the assembly might not want to hear it.

-MM states that they were never aware that motions must go through the DPC for approval. They also state that they had a different issue, whereby they did not want someone in particular to see the motion beforehand.

-AR states that the e-mail which included the motion requested that it was not disclosed before the assembly.

Part of this discussion has been removed due to the breach of Union Staff Protocol.

-AR states that this has been discussed extensively. JML states that this is an important issue. AR explains that this goes beyond assembly, and this should perhaps be taken further as certain things cannot be disclosed.

-An assembly member states that they are concerned that the chair is talking and trying to move things along when people have their hands up and want to speak.

-AR states that they are simply conscious of time, and there are more things to be discussed.

-The assembly member states that this is very important. JML concurs.

-AR states that they understand the importance of the matter, however it is a priority in the assembly to ensure that things like events happen.

-An assembly member states that the Activities and Opportunities Officer is in place for events.

-TB expresses their support in the chair for wanting to move things along, as they state that, as a former chair of assembly, it is important to ensure that all points are covered, however they do not support closing the issue.

-AR states that the issue will not yet be closed.

-TB, in response to the training issues that AR expressed, recommends attending some DPC meetings. They explain that last year's Postgraduate Education Officer attended some of these meetings which served as a very good forum to get feedback on pg(su) processes.

-AR states that staff will be conducting training for both the chair of assembly and the chair of committee to ensure that similar pitfalls are not encountered in the future.

-TB states that attending DPC would be solely in the scope of receiving advice, since DPC cannot make decisions. They can simply debate on processes and advise on the best course of action, which can prove useful if, for example, the chair wishes to bring something to Union Council.

-JML asks whether the claim that nothing was said beforehand can be investigated. They explain that, being present at the previous assembly as a committee member, it felt like the room was full of people who seemed very keen to get rid of the committee. They state that, while nobody was supposed to know about the motion beforehand, it seemed like some assembly attendees knew about it, and the fact that the Postgraduate Education Officer was absent seemed almost conspiratorial. JML states that, if this is the case, it is quite serious in critical affairs and it should be investigated. They explain that, while they are making no accusations, it felt like the assembly was set up, and this feeling was shared by the few PGRs who happened to be present at the assembly coincidentally, which serves as further reason to look into this. They state that, if there was somebody behind this, it needs to be examined as it would reflect very badly on the officer, and ultimately affect every postgraduate student.

- MM states that this will be looked into.
- An assembly member asks how events are advertised, as they were unaware of an assembly occurring during the time of the last one.
- AR states that there are efforts being undertaken to advertise the assembly on the Facebook and pg(su) pages.
- AE explains where resources from postgraduate committee and assembly can be found on the pg(su) page.
- RF states that they are mistakenly still listed as the chair of postgraduate committee on the sub-committee pages. AE states that they will fix this.
- AR states that event and assembly advertisements are also made on the chalkboard outside of the Scholars Bar.
- MG states that the pg(su) website still stated the old time, and it could not be seen anywhere that the assembly had been pushed to 6pm.
- AR states that they will undertake efforts for better advertisement.
- MM asks for any suggestions on the best media to utilise to reach postgraduate students.
- MA suggests directly e-mailing students about events.
- RF explains that pg(su) cannot e-mail students, unless they have consented to this.
- TB explains that there is a tick box on event registers, including the assembly register, through which people can opt into e-mails for events.
- MA asks whether there is a space on the website where people can opt into these e-mails.
- RF states that this is not available on the website for the moment, however assembly attendees can opt in simply by checking the box on the assembly register.
- AR asks TB, as the former chair of assembly, about what means they used to advertise their events and assemblies. TB states that they can put events on all social media, such as Twitter, however this is very difficult. They further explain that the current state of the pg(su) page is almost useless, since it is very difficult to navigate. They suggest doing something about the order of the pages, so that the assembly is visible on the first

page of pg(su), as it is quite hidden at the moment and it would be beneficial to make it as evident as possible.

-MG suggests that AR and MM both bring a formal apology to the next assembly meeting, where they explicitly state what they are apologising for in a structured manner. They explain that this would be beneficial if it was minuted for subsequent years, so that similar errors are avoided.

PGAA302 Pizza and Drinks

-Item ongoing throughout the meeting.

PGAA303 Open Discussion

-AR explains that no large-scale events have been scheduled or organised yet, and they wish to get the assembly's input before works are initiated on anything. They explain that the assembly can review and evaluate the events that occurred through the induction period to provide opinions on whether they would like to see similar or different events. AR asks the assembly to split into small groups and discuss this matter.

-MG repeats their earlier point that this is not exactly the reason that this body exists.

-AR states that the committee needs the consensus of the student body before organising something for the student body.

-TB states that the nature of the assembly is still not firmly grounded, and they express that it is a good opportunity to discuss matters that are pertinent to postgraduate students. They further explain that, at the present meeting, the only thing they can do either way is discuss, since the meeting is not quorate and therefore cannot vote on anything.

-AR explains that the idea was for the assembly to feed ideas back to the chair, so that they can take them to committee to address and act upon them. They ask the assembly to split into small groups and discuss, as they believe that this will facilitate more conversation than an open discussion.

-AR asks the assembly to come back together for open discussion.

-LM leaves the meeting since they were present in their capacity as a member of DPC, and the items concerning democratic procedures have already been discussed.

-An assembly member expresses their wish for a welcome party or welcome ball hosted by the Students' Union for postgraduates.

-Another member suggests putting measures in place to determine what demographics of the postgraduate community each event attracts. AR states that this is the intention, however they would like input from the assembly as to what kinds of events they would like.

-An assembly member states that it seems like there is a huge gap between PGTs and PGRs, and they therefore suggest an event which facilitates discussion between the two groups to bridge these gaps.

-Another assembly member suggests having board games.
-MM explains that the Scholars Bar already has quite a few board games which are open for use by postgraduates.

-SJ explains that the advertising needs to be heavily focused on, as a lot of people are unaware of postgraduate events going on around them, while things such as LCR events are quite well advertised. They further express their support for the postgraduate ball idea, as they believe it would be a great platform for the postgraduate community to connect.

-AR suggests that, as a member of committee, SJ could put this as an agenda item for the next meeting.

-An assembly member suggests holding more coffee mornings. The assembly concurs, and there are further suggestions for breakfast mornings, for example providing bacon butties.

-Another member suggests considering postgraduates with caring responsibilities as well, and making sure that a lot of events are in the mornings or around lunchtime, since these people will have caring responsibilities in the afternoons and evenings.

-A member in the assembly states that the previous events as stated in the agenda were quite good, and they believe that, because their uptake was quite high, there need not be any significant changes to the programme.

-AR states that some of the events did not perform as well as they had hoped, and they could be looking into holding other events in the place of these.

-The assembly member asks whether AR would like to get more members into these events, or whether they would like the events to become more bespoke.

-AR states that, personally, they would be eager to get more members, so as to reach out to as many postgraduate students as possible.

-An assembly member suggests that some events will resonate more with specific groups of students, so events can be of a more targeted engagement nature.

-AR states that there is sometimes a lot of overlap between groups.

-The assembly member states that a lot of the participation comes from self-selecting students, meaning students who are very engaged with the pg(su) website, social media, graduate bar, or other media which pg(su) uses to advertise. They therefore support that this element is, to some extent, unavoidable.

-TB suggests that a member of staff could go around postgraduate spaces and ask postgraduate students if they would like to sign up to the pg(su) newsletter. They further state that, if this amount of engagement can be captured, then it could be assessed whether it is the reach, or the message itself that is wrong when there is a lack of engagement with specific ideas.

-An assembly member recalls tablets being used by Students' Union staff for Quality Conversations with students. They suggest that these tablets may also be used in the same way to sign up more people to the pg(su) newsletter.

-AR states that a lot of the points for discussion that come up at committee are around better advertising, and they therefore believe that such statements are very beneficial to inform how to improve on that front.

-The assembly member states that this can be made easier now that the Scholars Bar has postgraduate-exclusive access.

-SJ suggests utilising the space in Scholars Bar to raise awareness around the postgraduate committee, as it is a space that can provide voice to students, and if anybody has specific issues, they can be invited to bring these to the committee.

-TB concurs, and suggests that a good idea would be to have three different boxes with three different event ideas each month in the Scholars Bar, in which people can cast votes for which event they prefer the most.

-An assembly member suggests also trying to promote pg(su) in the Unio space.

-Another assembly member states that most of the job positions within the Students' Union are held by undergraduates, as they have been at the university for longer. They believe that some jobs should be specific to postgraduates, so that they can also

receive both the financial and experiential benefits of having employment. Another assembly member concurs, and states that if they want to get a part-time job, they need to travel to the city.

-MM states that this is one of their priorities, and they will be having meetings within the next two weeks regarding this. They state that this could come in the form of either some job positions becoming prioritised for postgraduates, or the SU creating new jobs for postgraduates only.

-An assembly member states that the only opportunities provided by CareerCentral are student ambassador positions which hardly provide a couple of hours' work per week, and travelling to the city can take a lot of time out of their studies.

-MM expresses their understanding, and they also state that postgraduate students may struggle more financially.

-Another member states that undergraduates have a higher chance of getting jobs as it is, and this should be equalised.

-AR states that this will be addressed, and asks for any further issues that the assembly would like to raise.

PGAA304 Any Other Business

-No other business.

PGAA305 Time, date and place of next meeting

6pm, Tuesday 13th November, Bookable Room 6