

7th May 2019 UGM Minutes

UGM AGENDA

Time:	16:00-18:00
Date:	7th May 2019
Location:	JCR
Chair:	Jack Footitt, SOAS Student Experience Officer

Agenda

1. Introduction and Ground rules
2. Co-Presidents' reports
3. Ratification of [Minutes](#) from last four UGMs
4. Motion #1: Reform UGM Rules
5. Motion #2: Stop Racism and Islamophobia at University of Essex
6. Motion #3: Weekly emails on strikes, impacts of strikes, and support to students
7. Motion #4: Solidarity with Sri Lanka
8. Emergency motion: Declare a climate emergency
9. Emergency motion: S.U. shouldn't support unconscious bias training for academic staff as part of compulsory Equalities training before it is debated by the student body
10. AOB

Introduction to the meeting

1. Jack Footitt introduced himself and outlined rules of the UGM, including our respect policy. Called a quoracy count - decided to go ahead with the meeting.

2. Co-Presidents' reports - Hau-Yu gave report on Democracy & Education-related matters: Mit circs evidence is due 8 May, Exams season is imminent (starts 9 May), and SU are launching their care calendar in conjunction with Student Advice and Wellbeing. Reminded students to speak to Susanna, SU Welfare & Advice Caseworker. Student Development Fund is being launched later this month. UNISON are balloting for strike action - we will hear soon about the result.

Yousra and Soph gave apologies.

3. Minutes all ratified.

UGM MOTIONS

Motion #1

Title:	Reform Clarify UGM Rules
Proposer:	Tam Hau-Yu (hy12)
Seconder:	Krum Tashev (666404)
<p style="text-align: center;">This Union Notes:</p> <p>1.1 The UGM rules are outdated. They contain quite significant contradictions and ambiguities, and refer to staff roles which no longer exist.</p> <p>1.2 The SU this year has been invested in governance reform, including voting to reform the SU Board of Trustees and discussing the reforms of the Research Students' Association. Updating the UGM rules are part of this process.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">This Union Believes:</p> <p>2.1 That the UGM rules should be reformed - this is the proposed version: https://docs.google.com/document/d/19rDrtrkRBKYSUDyntO0ZdFH52KA9g9_2zg4wRto7i2as/e/dit?ts=5ca62e39 - now found here as the 'UGM rules', updated 7 May 2019, on https://soasunion.org/democracy/governance/</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">This Union Resolves:</p> <p>3.1 To approve this version of the UGM rules: https://docs.google.com/document/d/19rDrtrkRBKYSUDyntO0ZdFH52KA9g9_2zg4wRto7i2as/e/dit?ts=5ca62e39</p> <p>3.2 This document will be open to edit to all students, up until Monday 29th April 4PM. Every student is welcome to make edits, so long as they leave their student ID. We are also welcoming feedback sent to us via email, should you wish to make these edits more anonymously.</p> <p>3.3 Minor feedback e.g. typos and contradictions will be accepted and the document amended accordingly. We will engage with more major feedback via email. It is a possibility that if it can't be resolved, that we will suggest the piece of feedback be submitted as an amendment at the event of the UGM on Tuesday 30th April.</p> <p>3.4 Should there be over five significant amendments made to the proposed reforms to these UGM rules, that the rules should be withdrawn.</p>	

Minutes of meeting:

Proposer Hau-Yu: The UGM rules contained references to a Co-President Finance & Communications, other ambiguities related to time windows and definition of what constitutes “x number of days”. These are not constitutional changes but a clarification of the wording.

Amendment: Change UGM title from “Reform UGM rules” to “Clarify UGM rules”

No speeches against the amendment

Amendment passed

No speakers against amended motion

Amended motion passed

Action point:

Upload clarified UGM rules to website

Motion #2

Title:	Stop Racism and Islamophobia at University of Essex
Proposer:	Andrew Awad (665519)
Seconder:	Dahlia Kholiaif (666629)
<p>This Union Notes:</p> <p>1.1 University of Essex failed to apply its zero-tolerance policy.</p> <p>1.2 The Proctor is only one man who decides, and his decision cannot be appealed to change the results.</p>	
<p>This Union Believes:</p> <p>2.1 The action that was carried out by the university did not only affect the performance and the well-being of the Egyptian Muslim student, but also, will subject other students in the future to the same kind of treatment. As the university tolerated in such a case: hate speech, verbal, physical abuse and threats to kill and deport.</p>	

This Union Resolves:

3.1 Condemn the failure of the university in applying its zero-tolerance policy and failure in the usage of their standard of proof.

3.2 Organize an online campaign about hate crimes not only at Essex university but also across UK. Asking students to share their stories and how their universities acted to them.

3.3 Writing a statement to show support to the Egyptian Muslim student at Essex university.

3.4 The staff member shall be held accountable for his acts.

Minutes of meeting:

Proposer Andrew: I didn't prepare much for this speech. (he paraphrases the motion and invited the Essex student complaining herself on stage to speak.)

Essex student: recounts story of how she was harassed and physically assaulted by a human rights lecturer at the University of Essex, who was also her former housemate. The university did not handle the complaint satisfactorily, including disregarding evidence that a witness provided of the lecturer threatening them. This means a lot to her. She asks for pressure from other S.U.'s to support, and to share the online petition.

No amendments

No speeches against

Motion passed

Action point: Hau-Yu to share online petition with students

Hau-Yu adds that SU have been and continue to work on this case, and the issues it represents.

Motion #3

Title:	Weekly emails on strikes, impacts of strikes, and support to students
Proposer:	Camilla Munkedal (637391)
Seconder:	Patrik Malec (636334)

This Union Notes:

- 1.1. That UNISON is balloting for strikes at SOAS among UNISON members
- 1.2. That such strikes would most likely occur during exam time, and might therefore disrupt exams and cause additional stress to many students
- 1.3 That the responsibility of UNISON is to protect the rights, well-being, and interests of UNISON members
- 1.4 That the responsibility of the SOAS SU co-presidents is to protect the rights, well-being, and interests of students
- 1.5 That the SOAS SU co-presidents to this date have not sent out any information on how strikes might impact students, nor have they sent out any information on which support would be available to students in the event that their studies and/or exams will be affected by strikes

This Union Believes:

- 2.1 That the SOAS SU has a responsibility to support the well-being of students in this period of uncertainty about strikes and in the event that strikes will take place
- ~~2.2 That solidarity with workers and respect for their right to strike should not undermine the well-being of students and the responsibility of the SOAS SU~~
- 2.2 Alongside solidarity with workers, SOAS S.U. is responsible for the wellbeing of the students.'
- 2.3 That regular updates to students on strikes as well as information about how strikes will impact students and which support is available to students will help mitigate some of the stress that students will experience during this period

This Union Resolves:

- 3.1 That SOAS SU co-presidents should, with immediate effect, send out at least weekly emails containing updates to students on the impending UNISON strikes as well as information on how such strikes will impact students and which support is available to students
- 3.2 That SOAS SU co-presidents should in all future instances of strikes or impending strikes at SOAS send out at least weekly emails containing updates to students on strikes as well as information on how strikes will impact students and which support is available to students

Minutes:

Proposer Camilla: It's in the interest of all students to know how they will be affected by the possible upcoming strikes. It's the responsibility of the S.U. to know, and to let students know. This hasn't happened so far, and students are in the dark. I've found out that balloting is still happening to find out how UNISON members want to proceed, and a result should be coming this week.

Question: in clause 2.2 That solidarity with workers and respect for their right to strike should not undermine the well-being of students and the responsibility of the SOAS SU. The language of "undermine" seems itself undermining or inappropriate here.

Answer: Understood, but that is in there explicitly to ensure it won't happen. There was an amendment to the Emergency (N.B. as per Motion #1, it should be noted this type of UGM is now called an Extraordinary UGM) UGM motion last time, which mentioned collaborative support. That was not passed. I don't understand that.

Amendment: to change the wording in 2.2 to 'Alongside solidarity with workers, SOAS S.U. is responsible for the wellbeing of the students.'

Amendment passes

Amended motion passes

Motion #4

Title:	Solidarity with Sri Lanka
Proposer:	Archanaa Seker (665966)
Seconder:	Tam Hau-Yu (hy12)
This Union Notes: 1.1 That the recent tragedy in Sri Lanka involving the loss of nearly 400 lives and injury to 500 more people.	
This Union Believes: 2.1 That it is appropriate to reaffirm its ongoing support, sympathy and condolences to the families of those affected both those from a Sri Lankan background, and those from various international backgrounds.	

This Union Resolves:

3.1 To hold a vigil in conjunction with SOAS Christian Union, SOAS Help Sri Lanka society, SOAS India society and SOAS Pakistan society. This will be at 5pm on Thursday 2 May on Main Steps. (Amended to Thursday 9th May)

Minutes:

Seconder Hau-Yu: read motion and noted that the vigil is happening regardless on the 9th May 2019, 5pm Main Steps.

No amendments

No speeches against

Motion passed

Emergency Motion

Title:	Declare a Climate Emergency
Proposer:	Daniel Selwyn (656546)
Seconder:	Youssra Elmagboul (ye3)

This Union Notes:

1.1 That there is a global climate and ecological crisis: the sixth mass extinction is annihilating life forms at an unprecedented rate; climate change and extreme weather are leading to severe water scarcity and food insecurity, increasing wars and conflict, and displacing millions of people.

1.2 That the British state has a particular historical responsibility for creating the climate and ecological crisis as the geopolitical origin of fossil capitalism, which it financed through the profits of racial slavery and spread across the world through (settler) colonialism and indigenous genocide-ecocide.

1.3 That the City of London is a global epicentre of extractive and financial imperialism. The London Stock Exchange lists 'natural resources' worth \$1 trillion in Africa alone, a land area four times the size of the UK, and carbon reserves equivalent to ten times the UK's domestic carbon budget.

1.4 That recent mass strike action by students across the world to highlight the immense dangers and injustices of the climate and ecological crisis are encouraging and a political imperative.

1.5 That many courses and departments at SOAS do not integrate the climate and ecological crisis into their curricula and pedagogy.

This Union Believes:

- 2.1 That climate and ecological crises are the result of centuries of colonial and capitalist projects in the pursuit of domination and profit; these have been resisted for as long as they have been practiced.
- 2.2 That declarations of 'crisis' or 'emergency' are integrally linked to these colonial power structures which determine which 'crises' are recognised, when, by whom, and who is made responsible for acting on them.
- 2.3 That a just transition is not about managing future risks to Western populations and states but establishing reparations and remediation led by and for Indigenous, Black, brown, queer, trans, disabled and poor communities across the global South and in the global North, who experience the structural violence of pollution, hunger, drought, floods and displacement as extensions of their marginalisation.
- 2.4 That a just transition should establish legal rights for ecosystems to thrive and regenerate; and repair the effects of ongoing ecocide to prevent extinction of humans and all species, in order to maintain a livable, just planet for all.
- 2.5 That climate justice should oppose all forms of capitalism, nationalism, militarism and fascism that profit from ecological and social violence; and refuse any collaboration with agents that uphold and extend the racialized violence of borders, police and prison systems unless it is accountable to the marginalised groups oppressed by them.

This Union Resolves:

- 3.1 To declare a climate and ecological emergency which acknowledges and apologises for the complicity of academic institutions like SOAS in creating the conditions for it by producing knowledge in service of colonial, imperial and military power.
- 3.2 To incorporate climate justice integrally into the SU's policy and campaigning; and work to ensure its inclusion in curricula and pedagogy across departments, courses and research (added by amendment) at SOAS.
- 3.3 To call on SOAS to divest all of its financial investments in institutions, corporations and government bodies that profit from extractivism, apartheid and climate and ecological crisis, and boycott institutional affiliations with them.
- ~~3.4 To call on SOAS to meet net zero carbon emissions as an institution by 2025 through a just transition as outlined above.~~
- 3.4 To call on SOAS to meet zero carbon emissions as an institution by 2030 through a just transition as outlined above.
- 3.5 To provide material and logistical support to the Youth Climate Strikes and climate justice collectives in London, such as Wretched of the Earth, Black Lives Matter UK and Platform; to involve them in the above processes; and to facilitate spaces for collective learning, organisation and mobilisation. We don't support Extinction Rebellion in its current form. (added by amendment)

Minutes:

Proposer Daniel: London is the origin colonial extractivism and the centre of extractive finance.
We need to take action that is not ahistorical.

Question: How should we identify which organisations should receive help as per 3.5?

Answer: Any organisations that are principally in-line with the points made in this motion - we don't need to write out an exhaustive list. So climate justice collectives that adhere to the above principles e.g. Wretched of the Earth, Platform London

Amendment 1: We should be clear that we don't agree with Extinction Rebellion

Speech against amendment 1: to explicitly say that seems counterproductive, as well as giving that movement more publicity anyway. The construction of the motion implicitly critiques XR.

Speech for amendment 1: I don't think XR will change anytime soon. We can pass a new motion in future if it does change.

Speech against amendment 1: I think there should be room given and chances afforded for organisations to change and improve.

Speech for amendment 1: my final wording is to "to say we don't support XR in its current form" as part of section 3.6

Amendment 1 passes

Amendment 2: Change 3.4 to "To call on SOAS to meet zero carbon emissions as an institution by 2030 through a just transition as outlined above."

No speeches against amendment

Amendment 2 passes

Amendment 3: Add "research" to 3.2 in light of SOAS' status as a centre for development studies.

No speeches against amendment

Amendment 3 passes

No speeches against amended motion

Amended motion passes

Emergency Motion

Proposer: Alia Osman (536759)

Seconder: Amy Thompson (635443)

Title : The Students Union should not support Unconscious Bias training for academic staff as part of compulsory Equalities training, before it is debated by the Student body.

Proposed by : Alia Osman

Seconded by : Amy

This union notes that : Soas is belatedly providing compulsory Equalities training for academic staff which includes training for Unconscious Bias.

Unconscious Bias training has not been discussed by the student body and with the Students Union.

Unconscious Bias can be used to cover up violations of Equalities policies and harassment and Gender Based violence.

The Union may have conflict of interests in supporting complaints of GBV and Discrimination and at the same time Unconscious Bias training.

Despite serious complaints by students of violations such as Gender Based Violence, Islamophobic and racist discrimination, harassment and Bullying, These violations against students have never been resolved through Soas complaints procedures. The Students Union should therefore not be compelled to support Soas management's Unconscious Bias Training, without consent from the Union.

The Union believes that Unconscious Bias should be debated by the Union, before it is endorsed and should only be supported if endorsed by the Student body through debate and consent.

The union must ensure that all protected categories defined under the Equalities Act 2010 are protected, and its own policies and practices are followed by the Students Union accordingly.

The Union resolves to debate Unconscious Bias.

The Union resolves not to support unconscious bias training for academic staff without debate with survivors of harassment, discrimination, GBV and the student body.

The Union resolves to postpone support for Equalities training at Soas which legitimises Unconscious Bias.

Minutes:

Proposer Alia: Equalities Act was introduced in 2010 to protect people against discrimination, and gives people the right to complain if you're being prejudiced against. The school has introduced unconscious bias training as a way to educate people about implicit biases that people have and how these affect behaviour and how they treat people. However this training is always used as an excuse, and stops people from being held accountable. If every staff do something problematic, they are sent on this training. We need to talk about this as a student body so we know what is going on, and not just blindly support it.

Question: What would a debate about this look like?

Answer: A public forum where people can talk about it

Speech against the motion: This is shutting down the conversation - the initiative to have unconscious bias trainings was started by people of colour here in SOAS. Obviously it's insufficient by itself to deal with prejudice and discrimination, but it's a starting point for people who haven't learned about this before. People will claim ignorance, but this training means they can learn and can't use that excuse. Trainings are important as a way to hold people accountable. You could come to the Decolonising SOAS Open Meeting tomorrow and speak to Meera, one of the staff members who started this.

Speech for the motion: We've always been told there will be more training - this just needs to be a discussion amongst the student body. Training is used as an excuse.

Action Point:

S.U. to have an open debate about Unconscious Bias training

S.U. to work with student on this issue