Executive Committee Meeting Minutes

18 December 2020
11am - 1pm

Chair: Sabrina Shah

Agenda

1. Officer Check In
2. LGBT History Month
3. Clarification Over SU Payment Process
4. UoL Rent Strike
5. Update on FFFP and J4W SOAS Working Conditions
6. DHM Reflections
7. Hierarchy in the SU
8. AOB

Apologies: Emma Thackwray

In attendance: Roza Atac, Oscar Ward, Felix Henson, Yasmin Elsouda, Katherine Saunders, Hasan Zakria, Sabrina Shah, Dideolu Olufelo, Hisham Parchment, Heleena Pankhurst, Sara Lloyd-Knibbs, Sohane Yahya, Lucia Pedroso, Josh Mock, Victor Max Smith, Ella Spencer

1. Officer Check In

Dideolu: Hi everyone, this is my first meeting as Postgraduate Research Officer. I'm looking forward to working with you all!

Heleena: Held Black & PoC meeting recently.

Yasmin: Would be great to work collectively with you and the Black & PoC network next term. I've been working with the students working on the UoL Rent Strike, and attending a lot of the national organising spaces. Some exciting work happening with campaigns too.

Oscar: Helping out with University of Essex's rent strike planning, and day to day Dinwiddy support.

Katie: Nothing really to update on!

Felix: DHM House Party tonight, and working on a student case with Oscar.

Sara: Lots to do as both a rep and for mature students.

Roza: Been working on EiE workshops - hired facilitators, editing the Moodle, and ran a practice workshop recently. Had to cancel the SU/SAaW event for next week, but we'll still be holding a drop in session.

Hisham: Lots of uni deadlines. Doing some work for The Robeson and am ready for a rest over the break!

Sohane: Ran my DHM event, which ran into difficulties unfortunately with the guest speaker. Thinking about how we can better organise liberation months going forward. Planning an Anti-Racism Week with Hisham for February.

Hasan: Recruited an International Student Support Officer for the SAaW team - an experimental role, which I'm going to help them see how we can support international students based on student research. I've also put out an events survey and people want events which create deeper interactions, so I'm thinking about how we can facilitate that in an online space.

Lucia: Resolving a student issue. Ran a DHM event on Thursday which was a success.

2. LGBT History Month

Hasan: Reached out to Pride @ SOAS - haven't started planning yet but hoping to start in the next week and have lots of ideas. Also doing my own outreach work. Sohane, do you have any advice based on your thinking about liberation months?

Sohane: BHM had its own instagram post on the SU Instagram page but DHM didn't. Maybe less events in the month, and create a team in Exec whose job it is to prepare and design posters for the advertisement as we're totally online. We also need to improve our communication between each other. Perhaps also a way to better schedule the times of events.

Josh: I'd like to meet about this first week back with event ideas, and a less is more approach would be best.

Felix: The Moodle is a great idea for centralisation but no one knows it exists and that's where we advertise all of our events

Lucia: Perhaps we could use Slack or something else on Microsoft for internal comms among ourselves?

A discussion was had around creating a shared scheduling account for SU Instagram content.

3. Clarification Over SU Payment Process

Felix: We can only pay after the delivery of the service, which doesn't seem fair.

Oscar: I agree. Perhaps we can have a memorandum of understanding so people will have a good understanding that we will pay. If we're paying people for something where they need set up costs then we should pay in advance. Maybe we could get some standard forms set up for this.

Sabrina to speak with Anna about this.

4. UoL Rent Strike

Yasmin: Kind of already covered this in my officer update. I'll talk more about this when we're back from the break!

5. Update on FFFP and J4W Working Conditions

Yasmin: We've been sending out email actions and putting things on our social media but we need a lobbying strategy to stand in solidarity with our cleaners. Our concerns include

how will the cleaning team continue to do their work as their teams have been reduced by around 40% due to transformation and change.

FFFP seem to be getting ignored by the School. We've made a bit more progress with FFFP than J4W.

A discussion was had around how to better get responses and engagement from management. An open meeting is being planned for FFFP and J4W in the near future to get more student involvement.

Lucia: With return to campus it seems that next term will likely have some in person classes or tutorials, and it's likely fractionals will be made to work in these spaces. We should have a statement on this prepared for next term.

Sabrina: We're stuck in between two passionate camps: Students who don't want to come onto campus as it's dangerous, and Students who desperately want to return to campus. With other UoL universities back on campus we need to diversify the teaching methods. My initial reaction is it's unsafe to open up, but some students also need us to open up (e.g. for mental health reasons).

A discussion was had around the concerns around return to campus.

Yasmin: While it looks like the School will be holding some in person activities later in the year, they have promised that they will also be hosting everything online so there's no *need* to come to SOAS in person if students don't feel comfortable.

Dideolu: Research students don't share the same sentiment about getting back on campus. We don't need a classroom setting. A lot of research students are also international students so time zones affect their ability to attend scheduled meetings.

Oscar: Students are wondering if they still need to be in London because of SOAS' blending learning promise. Dinwiddy's contract are unbreakable but lots of students still took them with the anticipation they'd have in person activities at some point, and now students are unhappy they're paying rent when they don't need to be in London.

Sara: I don't think the university is aware of the financial implications of the pandemic on students. People are not able to work as many hours as they'd like, or are working in positions which make them anxious.

Yasmin: NUS researched over summer to see what students' concerns were for the year ahead, and the results were exactly what we've said here. It would be good for us to use a survey to provide data to SOAS on what they can do to improve the student experience in term 2.

A discussion was had around tuition fee strikes.

6. DHM Reflections

Felix: DHM has gone well but turnout has been quite low. Some miscommunication over dates for events, however it was amazing how everyone came together to organise DHM.

Hisham: Wanted to echo Josh in that fewer events would be ideal, especially with Zoom fatigue. Redirect resources and money towards fewer events and hopefully we'd have less instances of low turnout.

Lucia: Some of the BHM mistakes were a bit amended during DHM, however there's lots of things we still need to change, e.g. access to mailing lists. We need to remove some of the obstacles that make event organising difficult.

Felix: It would be helpful for the SU to build a relationship with audio describers and BSL interpreters so we can get good rates on all of our events - we shouldn't be doing this on the odd events only.

Jack explained how SU emails work and can be sent by Exec.

7. Hierarchy in the SU

Lucia: I wanted to raise certain issues which are limiting in how the SU is structured. This reflects on the access Exec have to certain SU platforms. (1) Zoom - I think we need more than 1 account, as 1 isn't enough for the number of events we host. (2) Platforms such as social media and mailing lists.

Do we have capacity to open more Zoom accounts?
Exec should have more access to mailing lists and social media.

Yasmin: Specifically on the Zoom point: The Zoom account is an SU account and we can't share it as Anna's bank details are visible on the account. The School has given staff Zoom accounts, and we've asked for accounts for events but the School said no due to GDPR reasons. In terms of hierarchy I want you to know that things aren't made more difficult on purpose.

A large discussion was had around the use of Zoom by the SU. Support was raised for Exec having Zoom pro accounts as students are comfortable with using Zoom, and Exec wouldn't need to chase Sabbs for Zoom access when needed. Opposition for this was raised as other platforms are also easy to use and integrate, and with SU staff on furlough it may be unfair to spend SU money on extra Zoom accounts.

Lucia: I agree with the excessiveness of creating new Zoom accounts. There is an inequality of access for who gets to control and organise things on the platforms the SU has access to. It is tiring to chase people to have things done. There is currently a clearly defined hierarchy between Sabbs and Exec.

Sara: I don't think we all need accounts, but maybe accounts for specific Exec who need it. I feel like I know it's not difficult to learn other platforms, however I keep getting told to do things differently and it feels very inaccessible. Learning new platforms stresses people out.

Hisham: Just in response, perhaps we can make a How To document to help people operate on different platforms.

Hasan: The Zoom issue is something I consulted with other SUs about. Other SUs vary from all students having Zoom Premium accounts, to encouraging students to use free alternatives. When pressing SOAS to give Zoom accounts they said no due to the other free platforms available. It was communicated to societies that because free alternatives are available we won't refund them for Zoom accounts, and societies have been on board with that so far. There's not been many clashes using this system so far. We have okayed a society to get their own Zoom account as they have regularly scheduled events which would take up too much time in the SU Zoom account. We could look at getting an Exec Zoom account if there are recurring events or there is a specific reason you need Zoom instead of any other platform, however I'm cautious not to create accounts and then not be hosting lots of events as this will cost money.

Sabrina: Just to come in quickly, going forward, Anna's details are still on the account and so Hasan will still have to action this account. The only reason the Sabbs have Zoom accounts is because we're members of staff in the institution, the SU don't pay for these. We don't think students should have to go through us to get things done, however the School have been clear that there are other platforms for students so they won't pay for Zoom accounts.

Lucia: I think this platform discussion should be looked at on a case by case basis, but I raised this point to say there's a hierarchy difference that makes things harder for Exec. I know the Sabbs have lots of work, but I find it difficult that we have to remind the Sabbs to post on social media for us. We don't communicate with students through Exec, although we do a lot of work.

Jack discussed why there are restrictions for Exec to access to SU social media accounts.

8. AOB

N/A