



Union General Meeting Minutes

Thursday 25th November 2021

1pm - 3pm

Zoom

Chair: Ryan Ginger (City University)

Agenda

1. Introduction & Ground Rules
2. **Motion 1:** SOAS SU to Stand in Solidarity with UCU and UNISON
3. **Motion 2:** SOAS Complaints Procedure Reform
4. **Motion 3:** Extend Online Tutorials
5. Executive Committee Reports
6. Ratifying the Minutes of the Previous UGM
7. AOB

1. Ground Rules & Introduction

Ryan: Welcome to the SOAS SU UGM. This meeting is being recorded. UGMs are your chance to ask questions and debate on policy. It's integral for SUs that students engage in democracy, so thank you for coming.

I'm Ryan Ginger (he/him) and I'm the Membership & Insights Coordinator in City SU. As part of my role I lead on insight and research work, particularly relating to wellbeing (e.g. covid's effect on teaching and learning), I sit on the EDI committee, and I have experience in 2 SUs working in democracy.

Ryan introduced the SU staff supporting in the meeting and their roles.

Ryan: This meeting will follow the SU Constitution and the UGM Ground Rules. We want to encourage respectful, open discourse and will not tolerate hate speech. If you have any concerns about the way this UGM is being run or you think someone is breaking the Ground Rules please raise this as a POI directly to Ella.

Ryan ran through the 3 agenda points to be discussed, and explained how the motion debate process works.

2. Motion 1: SOAS SU to Stand in Solidarity with UCU and UNISON

Proposer Introduction

Maxine: This motion is about standing in solidarity with the upcoming UCU strikes (Dec 1-3). The strikes are over 2 main points: 1) pensions being cut on an average of 35%, 2) pay cuts; gender, racial and disability pay gaps; casualisation; and the soaring workload of staff. UNISON also has a live ballot taking place over a pay dispute from last year and will also be striking in solidarity with UCU.

This motion recognises why this strike is important and why it's important to stand in solidarity with them. The issue the strike is addressing is part of the wider issue of the marketisation of higher education, and it also affects our experiences as students.

The resolutions of this motion says that the SU will show full and public support to UCU and UNISON with any industrial action taking place at any time this term/next term; to ensure the SOAS Director and management lobby the national bodies who determine advice on pay; for any money that staff will miss out on being paid to be put into a hardship fund for students to access.

It's in our interest and the interest of staff to support these strikes and show solidarity.

Questions

No questions were raised

Amendments

No amendments were raised

Speech Against

No speech against was raised

Speeches For / Against

N/A

Proposer Summary

Maxine: It's important as students we stand in full solidarity with our staff, especially relating to the disputes this strike is over and how it affects casualised staff. Also once we leave university we could also be exploited at work and it's important we learn from this process of striking and taking action with your union.

3. Motion 2: SOAS Complaints Procedure Reform

Proposer Introduction

Mudaser: TW: themes of abuse and harassment.

Whilst it pains me to raise this motion and highlight the inadequacy of the complaints procedures, there's a member of our community - and many more - who have been failed by the SOAS complaints procedure. You can see this through the independent review of SOAS' complaints procedure (done by academics of other institutions) that recently happened which showed that this procedure is inadequate.

I want you to imagine you're looking for a source of empowerment by joining a higher education institution, but when you do attend you're faced with racism, anti-semitic remarks and harassment that persists over a number of years. And when you complain about this you're met with victimisation. The perpetrator makes you feel worse and more isolated.

Unfortunately this is an experience of a student at SOAS and the complaints procedure has failed them and also many others.

Questions

No questions were raised

Amendments

No amendments were raised

Speech Against

No speech against was raised

Speeches For / Against

N/A

Proposer Summary

Mudasar: What I want to conclude by saying is I want to implore you all as the student body to not be afraid of SOAS. If you have complaints against the system or your treatment by the university or staff please don't be afraid and please put pressure on them.

We're aware there's problems in the system. Share this link and vote in favour of the system. If SOAS can penalize us for late submissions then we can penalise them for taking too long in the complaints procedure.

4. Motion 3:

Proposer Introduction

Taha: As everyone is aware SOAS has announced that online tutorials will stop after term 1. This means international students who are still abroad, or the immunocompromised, will have to attend in person tutorials. They will have to endanger themselves for a system which could be kept online. We want students to be able to access tutorials online. We're not asking for every tutorial to be online, but a certain amount - 1 online tutorial per module. We just want to enable international students to access their studies online during a pandemic.

Questions

Question 1: Why does the resolution not include the entirety of the term?

Answer 1: The proposal asks to extend beyond term 1, so will encompass the entire year.

Question 2: Could we alter the title of the motion to specify it for vulnerable students so students understand the scope of the motion more?

Answer 2: (Ryan): You'll have to submit this as an amendment.

Question 3: Does that mean we will still need to come to London as 1 module will be offering online tutorials?

Answer 3: (responded below)

POI: Lucia: In regards to this question, there's another set of rules about VISAs and international students Int students are requested to come to london from term 2 as the UKVI is not something soas has control over.

Amendments

Amendment 1: Change the title of this motion to be '*Extension of Online Tutorials for international students and students facing health vulnerabilities preventing them from joining in person*'?

Argument Against: Would this not require students to disclose they are vulnerable?

Argument For: To include other than physical conditions (e.g. mental health)

Argument Against: It takes a really long time to get through the SOAS bureaucracy to get the appropriate 'proof' of medical reasons to stay online

Vote:

For 12

Against 2

Abstain 1

This amendment passes

In favour of: Change the title of this motion to be '*Extension of Online Tutorials for international students and students facing health vulnerabilities preventing them from joining in person*'?

Speech Against

No speech against was raised

Speeches For / Against

N/A

Proposer Summary

Taha: To recap, this is a motion that does not apply to all students. It's in particular for overseas or students with underlying health conditions - whether that be anxiety, immunocompromised, or anything else. This will allow students who are anxious for their health to still be able to access their tutorials or seminars online. It won't take away the ability of any student to access their tutorial in person.

5. Executive Committee Reports

Officers present: Lucia Rodriguez-Pedroso, Khadijah Ankunda, Ella Spencer, Hisham Pryce-Parchment, Ellora Singh, Rbeeza Mobeen, Jacynthe Roesch and Lena Koch.

Taha: Is there a limit to the number of votes that needs to be achieved for a motion to be successful?

Ryan: Yes, we'll cover this in a minute. Quora for each motion is 50 votes.

No other questions were raised, but attendees were invited to message officers directly for any further questions following the meeting.

6. Ratifying the Minutes of the Previous UGM

Ryan: The last UGM took place on May 21st 2021. Was anyone at this meeting also who would be able to ratify the minutes of this meeting?

Ella Spencer volunteered.

7. AOB

Ryan: Is there anything anyone would like to raise?

Mudasar: Thanks to the SU for continuing with UGMs even in this hybrid environment to get things moving for students.

Ryan: It's fantastic to see democracy continue online!
Thanks to everyone who attended today. The important part is the voting which you can do online for the 24 hours following this meeting.

Jack: Voting opens at 3pm, and if you have any issues voting please contact myself or Anna Dodridge.

Lucia: Thanks Ryan and everyone for attending! Remember to vote!