

TCD Students Union 4th Council Minutes 2022/23

31 January 2023

Ed Burke Theatre

Chair: Emma Gallagher
Secretary: Maggie Larson
Minutes: Maggie Larson, Secretary to Council
Simon Evans, Administrative Officer

Emma Gallagher welcomed everyone to the 4th Council of 2022/23.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Extraordinary Council meeting held on 1 December 2022 were approved.

2. Matters arising.

The Education Officer noted that she had forgotten to include the costings for voting systems in her report as promised at the previous meeting, and said that they would be included in the next email to class reps and would be made available to anyone who wanted them after council. She also welcomed the new EC member Astro and the new post grad reps.

A motion to admit and grant speaking rights to Sierra Muller Owens, USI VP for the Dublin Region was proposed by the President and approved by Council.

3. Elections

4. Sabbatical Officer Reports

(A) President: Gabi apologised for her report being late. She briefed council on the work on the SU café which was well in hand and will be opening this term. She congratulated Mihai, Ethnic Minorities Officer, on Refugee Week and she noted ongoing campaigns in respect of cost of living and housing protests and welcomed feedback on all campaign activity. There were no questions.

(B) Education: Zoe asked for her report to be taken as read. She thanked the postgrads for attending council and noted all the ongoing work in relation to setting up structures for the PG community: a postgrad town hall was held last week, results of postgrad elections were released today and minutes from the town hall will be circulated tomorrow. Finally, she noted that the class rep hoodies are in Teach a Sé and emails will be sent to class reps tomorrow.

Questions

- Ruaidhrí Saulnier asked what was being done about the unpaid internship issue. Zoe responded that although the current policies don't specify that internships must be paid, unpaid internships are illegal and this supersedes the policy.
- Bev Genockey asked why, at the November meeting of College Board, only the dissent of the Welfare Officer and President was recorded on the vote on student representation. Zoe confirmed that she also dissented but that this was not recorded in the minutes and it will be corrected under matters arising.

- Bev asked why there was a delay with circulating the costings of voting mechanisms which the OC had written to request earlier. Zoe replied that she will share full details with everyone tomorrow. Bev asked if it would be possible to obtain the figures during Council. Zoe said she could not produce the costings before the end of Council.

(C) Welfare: Chloe asked for her report to be taken as read. She thanked the Trinity Trust for funding recently granted to support the purchase of free sanitary materials and dispensers to be located in bathrooms throughout the campus. The initial tranche of funding is 7,000 and she will be looking for more funding in future years. Estates & Facilities have also agreed to help. She also noted that she had secured funding for food vouchers from the credit union with the help of the President and she is finalising the logistics for distribution shortly.

Questions

- Sierra Muller Owens thanked Chloe for the disability presentation she gave at a recent USI training event.
- The Digital Marketing Strategy class representative asked if the period product initiative would include the Business School. Chloe said that initial locations and logistics are currently being discussed, and that the most frequented/in-demand areas are being fulfilled first. She hopes to distribute period products across all of campus including St. James' and the School of Nursing and Midwifery in D'Olier St.
- The LGBTRO asked if period products would be supplied in men's bathrooms for trans students. Chloe replied that the aim was to designate gender neutral bathrooms first, and that period products could be made available in communal areas instead of bathrooms.

(D) Comms: Julie was on leave and her report was taken as read.

(E) Ents: Max apologised for not having his report ready as he was ill last week. Since last council he has run a Christmas event which was a great success and he also noted that work has been going on behind the scenes on Trinity Ball which is going ahead on 14th April. ReFreshers week was ongoing; Ents had put on a comedy show which had sold out; and finally he announced the Ents trip to Madrid.

Questions

- Zaid Barghouthi, International Students Officer/BDS Chair, asked if Ents would be open to helping non-EU students with visas for the trip to Madrid. Max replied that non-EU students who wished to take the trip would be assisted if possible.

5. Items for Noting:

a. EC Report – Schedule 3

The date for the close of nominations has been moved from February 6 to February 3 due to the bank holiday on Monday February 6.

b. Volunteer Forum Minutes #1

The Volunteer Forum Coordinator reminded Council that RAG Week is next week.

6. Motions

(a) Affordable Accommodation

The Welfare Officer, proposing the motion, said that if landlords are allowed to run loose without rent caps, “affordable” accommodation will no longer be affordable.

- The President, the seconder of the motion, proposed an amendment to remove the “20% affordable accommodation” figure as it had been pointed out that this was not in line with their affordability aims. **The amendment was accepted by the proposer of the motion.**
- Darragh Kane O’Toole, Applied Social Data Science class rep, noted that the right to reside issue with student accommodation is not addressed in the motion. Gabi confirmed that TCDSU are dealing with this issue and will continue to work on it.
- The JF BESS Class rep asked if there was an exact number on what the rent cap would be. Chloe replied that there would be several different rent caps as there were about 10 different types of accommodation (Single, Shared, On Suite, Double, 5 or 7 days, etc). It is tiered and that is why the Welfare & Equality Officer will review them.
- Aaron McDonnell, Mental Health Nursing Class Rep, asked if it would be possible to lobby the government for a student accommodation payment, similar to HAP, which would reduce the amount of rent students have to pay. Gabi replied that TCDSU will look into the issue, but that it is not within the specific remit of this motion.
- Sé Ó hEidhin said the motion was very splintered between officers and wanted to know who would ultimately oversee the motion implementation. The proposers replied that Welfare and President are involved because the Welfare Officer deals with accommodation and SU President deals with campaigns. This motion requires both officers with the President acting as liaison.

The amended motion was carried.

(b) Amendment to 2021/22-15: Motion on Recorded Lectures & Hybrid Learning

Laszlo Molnarfi, SSP Convenor, proposing the motion, said that the lack of lecture recording imposes restrictions on those who have family or work commitments or are neurodivergent or cannot attend a lecture for whatever reason. He said he had emailed multiple professors in his role as convenor and that the main issue according to them is the outsourcing of the work.

- Samantha Sink, Classics Dept PhD rep, asked if IT staff had already been informed of this and if they would have the bandwidth to take on any necessary extra work. Laszlo replied that the motion is left open to allow for this, and that an expansion of IT services may be necessary to deal with the issue. There is a gap in the college in relation to working equipment being available for all lecturers. The SU motion supports this and we are supported by the staff, trade unions and students on the matter.
- Grant McDonnell suggested that fully remote students may be disadvantaged by this due to limited resources and asked the proposer about the potential impact on these students. Laszlo replied that staff, schools and students are using up time and resources on calling in support, and not having it correct is actually costing more resources.

Bev Genockey suggested that if it is raised at USC it should also be raised at GSC.

The motion was carried.

(c) Amendment to 2021/22-23: Motion to support the TCD Postgraduate Workers Alliance (NEW NAME: 2021/22-23: Motion to Support PhD Groups)

Jeffrey Seathrun Sardina proposed the motion, speaking first in Irish and then in English. Speaking for the PhD groups, PGWA and PCAU, he described them as grassroots groups of PhD students fighting for all postgraduate students. He said the groups are asking for basic rights such as to be able to heat their homes, that they are not being paid enough, and that if

postgrads can't afford to study there will be no TAs and no one to correct work or supervise labs. He urged council to support the postgraduates.

Zoe Cummins fully supported the sentiments expressed and proposed an amendment to the motion to change the wording of the motion to reflect the merger of the two groups into PWO TCD. **The amendment was accepted by the proposers.**

Sé Ó hEidhin asked whether the wording should be changed from "in support of" to "in solidarity with" because support would imply that TCDSU is superior to the PhD groups. The proposer did not feel the change was necessary.

The amended motion was carried by council.

(d) Motion on Establishment of BAME Advisory Group

The motion was proposed by the President on behalf of herself and the Ethnic Minority Officer. She noted that the union was having its first racial equality week and urged council to support this motion to create an opportunity for different groups to come together and share.

A member of council asked the President to clarify what was meant by minority ethnicity. Gabi responded that there was no strict definition as cultural context applies; it is purposely open ended to allow anyone aligned with a minority ethnicity to be able to access these services.

The motion was carried.

(e) Motion on Fatphobia in College

Conor Dempsey, Citizenship Officer, proposed the motion. He spoke about the importance of viewing people holistically and affirming that there is nothing shameful about fat bodies, and urged Council to support the motion.

Faye Murphy, Deputy STEM Convenor, asked why the motion referred only to medicine and nursing when courses such as molecular medicine also include discussion of weight. Conor agreed to amend the motion to add the involvement of the STEM convenor and remove references to specific courses. **An amendment was proposed and accepted by the proposer.**

The motion was carried.

(f) Motion on Students Union Voter Registration Requirements

The motion was presented by Patrick Keegan, JF BESS class rep. Patrick noted that the motion had been amended to remove one of the mandates. He outlined that the aim of the motion was to make it easier to register and vote in class rep elections, so that voting in union elections would be viewed as something for everyone and not just those who register to vote in time.

JF Biomed class rep Harry Hannon asked why the proposers of this motion were suggesting removing voter registration from SU elections, but were in favour of voter registration drives for national elections. The proposer responded that they would prefer everyone be able to vote in every election they are eligible to without registration, but we don't have the power to change that outside of SU elections.

Bev Genockey asked if they would consider changing the motion to include the original mandates, suggesting that the mandate to pursue a data sharing agreement should be removed as this would have already been achieved if it was feasible. The proposer clarified that this had already been removed.

Zoe clarified that if this is mandated, and a data sharing agreement isn't obtained, the union would have to switch to paper based voting. Bev noted that AR has previously had a data sharing agreement to work with MiVoice which was used for the Provost elections.

Gabi said that she thinks there has been sufficient will expressed that council would prefer a system that doesn't require voter registration, and she is willing to do everything within her capacity as Chief Financial Officer to fulfil this.

Bev asked if TCDSU currently had a contract with an e-voting company. Zoe said that we do, as a contract with Eviabi was signed last week.

Eoin Connolly, JF PPES class rep, asked what would happen if the motion was passed and the mandate wasn't possible to fulfil. Bev responded that the mandate is possible to fulfil by using paper ballots which wouldn't require pre-registration.

Yannick Gloster, USC rep, claimed that a 2-year contract had been signed with Eviabi and that it would be costly to cancel this and move to paper ballots. He proposed that the motion be amended so that the mandate would take effect from after the 2023 sabbatical elections.

The proposer accepted this amendment.

Bev pointed out that the 2-year contract which had previously been in place had expired and that the Education Officer had confirmed at the last council that a new contract had not been signed. She believed that paper ballots would be cheaper.

Zoe agreed that they would be cheaper to print, but labour costs would also be associated with paper ballots. She said that due to students studying abroad and on placement needing postal/online voting and other considerations, paper ballots would be more expensive and less efficient.

Bev said that it was unfair for the Education Officer to say that one option is more expensive when they had refused to release their costings, which had been requested since October.

Patrick Keegan, summing up, urged council to vote in favour of the motion so that more people can vote in elections.

The amended motion was carried.

(g) Motion on the Students Union Running Voter Registration Drives

Patrick Keegan, proposing the motion, said that this would mandate TCDSU to hold voter registration drives to encourage students to vote in national elections. The President noted that voter registration drives would require An Garda Síochána and DCC to be present on campus, and that the union often holds voter registration drives in the run-up to national elections.

Darragh Kane O'Toole suggested the motion be amended to include Seanad elections, which many postgrads are eligible to vote in. **The proposer accepted the amendment.**

Sé Ó hEidhin felt the motion was redundant as this is already done and is under the remit of the Citizenship Officer and President.

Ruadhri Saulnier felt that registration drives should be held when an election has already been announced. Another member of Council said that as it takes some time for registration to be processed, in their experience around 50 days, it is worthwhile to register early.

The USI VP for the Dublin Region noted that this motion falls under the remit of the Equality & Citizenship Officer of USI and suggested bringing it to their attention for support from USI. The AHSS Convenor, Eoghan Gilroy, felt that previous comments on the motion were nitpicking, as it was currently done but not mandated.

Bev Genockey agreed with the motion, saying that students often change addresses and constituencies, and that registration drives would be a good thing with EU elections coming up.

Gabi proposed an amendment to specify that the President, Citizenship Officer and Communications Officer would be responsible for the mandate. **The proposer accepted the amendment.**

Darragh Kane O'Toole asked again about including the Seanad. **The motion was amended by the proposer to include Seanad, EU and local elections.**

The STEM Convenor, Sean Lysaght, proposed an amendment to specify social media rather than specific platforms. **The amendment was accepted.**

The proposer, summing up, said that while registration drives are already held, this motion would ensure that they are mandated and occur regularly.

The amended motion was carried.

(h) LTP Motion on Irish Unity

Brandon McGrane, proposing the motion, urged TCDSU to stand on the right side of history by supporting the motion.

Eoghan Gilroy, AHSS Convenor, spoke against the motion, saying that it was dangerous to accept this motion as long term policy as we don't know what a reunified Ireland would look like, and that the motion was politically divisive. He also disputed the claim that a United Ireland would make it easier for Northern students to study in Trinity. The proposer said in response that the students they had spoken to had faced barriers.

Eoin Connolly, JF PPES class rep, agreed with the AHSS Convenor, saying that the barriers for Northern students to attending Trinity are the result of the housing crisis, not the border, and that the union should be focusing on these other issues. He suggested that a united Ireland would equally create barriers to attending UK universities for Northern students.

The President, as a point of clarification, said that passing this motion would result in the LTP being put to a referendum which every student would be able to vote in.

Darragh Kane O'Toole, as a point of clarification, said that preparations for a potential reunification were underway and that the government had put aside five hundred million to plan for it.

Bev Genockey disagreed that the motion was sectarian in nature, and argued that the student body should be allowed to vote on it rather than the decision being made by Council.

Zaid Barghouthi, International Students Officer/BDS Chair, compared the motion to the BDS referendum which had also been contentious. He said that BDS was not the only way to address the Palestinian-Israeli issue, but that the referendum had allowed the union to take steps to speak about it and make it a TCDSU issue, and had made it possible to set up a working group. He argued that a referendum was beneficial in spreading information about political issues and bringing students into the discourse.

Sean Lysaght, STEM Convenor, said that although he was in favour of Irish unity, he felt Council should reconsider taking broad positions on this issue without a definite idea of what unity would look like. He said that there has been 25 years of peace in Northern Ireland and so Council should be careful about making a bold statement, which he said was likely to be covered by national media.

Sé Ó hEidhin proposed a motion K to defer the motion to the next council meeting, saying that the motion was messy and hard to explain to students, and required more discussion.

Muhammad Ziyad Anwer, JF Medicine class rep, seconded the motion K.

Bev Genockey asked as a point of clarification what was messy or "not clean" about the proposed referendum. Sé responded that the first lines of the motion, which would not be put to referendum, were very subjective and that the specific language should be considered.

The motion K failed to reach a two-thirds majority of voting members present.

Jeffrey Seathrun Sardina spoke in favour of the motion, saying that the only way to guarantee Irish language rights in the North is a government which respects the Irish language. He felt that the government in the south is not perfect but much better than the North's political representation. He was in favour of putting the motion to referendum.

Laszlo Molnarfi, SSP Convenor/BDS Secretary, spoke in favour of the motion, saying that similar motions have been passed by the students in DCU and Galway. He felt that, like the BDS referendum, this should be decided by the membership.

Brandon McGrane, summing up, argued that the decision should be put to the student body.

The motion failed to reach a two-thirds majority.

The Council meeting was adjourned at 9pm. The Chair thanked the members of Council for their participation.