

Open Meeting and Emergency General Meeting

16th May
1:30-3:30pm

MS TEAMS

Emergency General Meeting Minutes*

*As this is an EGM with a single motion to vote on, as set out in the constitution, only the motion will be discussed.

- **Welcome and Attendance**

- External Chair: Reem Walid (RW), Co-President of Democracy and Education, SOAS Students' Union
- Quoracy was met with over 60 students in attendance.

RW explains the process for the EGM and voting. Asks General Meeting attendees for any clarifying questions regarding the process of the EGM.

OM Would like to raise a point of clarification for the minutes. I've been accused of lying by repeating information that was said by a Sabb and Trustee regarding worker issues which was incorrect. I've clarified with students, and we're in agreement that I was accused of lying about is what they said. I do not appreciate being accused of lying by those who were elected to represent me.

I'd like to make a further point of clarification. Unite Hospitality is the Union that represents bar workers and from their legal services, I'm quoting that you have a legal right to join a trade union at any time. However, a Union Rep can only provide assistance when issues have come to light after the date of joining, so it would be inappropriate to point to Unite Hospitality if they were not already a member. So my point about training still stands. Another trade union under the Trade Unions Congress could not represent said worker either or they would face fines and sanctioning from the TUC. The Sabbs and Trustees are either lying to us, incompetent, or both.

RW Thank you, you've made your point. I think this is out of the scope of currently what the EGM is about. It's about the vote and it's about the motion. Everyone who's here has heard the for and against (*in the Open Meeting prior to the EGM*) and can make their own decision. If you want to take that further, then I think somewhere out of this meeting would be appropriate.

No further clarifying questions were asked.

- **Motions**

- Accountability and Transparency of Union officers, particularly with regards to giving away the Robbins Centre. ([Paper A](#))

- Motion Proposer Introduction

- OM: The decision made by the Trustee board to give away the Robin Centre to Stirling Hotel Services Limited was not made in students best interests and without the consultation of ordinary members. The Trustee board has spoken in this meeting (*in the Open Meeting prior to the EGM*) that the Union has been operating at a loss for so long and that this is the only outcome. However, despite a Trustee being the longest-sitting trustee member, I have no idea who they are. I do not know. I did not know what the role of the Trustee board had really until this meeting, which is a common theme among lots of students. It is detached from the student body and it has made no attempt to attempt to really fix the Robin Centre and ask what students want and prioritise.

The Stirling Hotel Services Limited has a history and as we have covered, many of whom are students and ordinary members of this Union. No proper efforts were made by the Trustee board to support the Union bar staff and drive engagement in hosting pub events and given a fair opportunity to drive up revenue. If there had been a bigger push to save the Union bar, then there would have been an abundance of students willing to help the Union. There's been a lack of transparency throughout this process that ordinary members of this Union are not allowed access to the Trustee board minutes.

So on that issue, we would be able to see what aspects the Trustee board did consider to make this decision. Further minutes from the AGM are still unavailable on the Union website, a meeting where students were not given adequate time to ask questions surrounding such an important issue. And until this EGM, to our knowledge, the Trustee board had not secured any kind of formal agreement from the University to secure anything such as the ability for students to use the venue for free. The Trustee board and Sabbatical Officers are supposed to make decisions in the students' best interests. And we 107 ordinary members, feel completely let down by this decision to give away the Robin Centre.

Through this motion, we aim to illustrate our disapproval of this decision and create further accountability measures in place so that a decision like this cannot be made in this way. Again, thank you.

- Clarifying Questions

- OM: Are there measures in place so that within the motion, if a situation like this does happen again, that the student body can hold the Union Trustee board to account more efficiently than

has been in this past situation? Is that part of the motion at all?

- OM: In the motion we have talked about accountability surgeries which other Students' Unions operate. These have the ability to reject Students' Union Officer reports where they believe the officers have not been properly representing students. This would be an aspect to what you're looking for.
- Speeches For and Against the Motion
 - OM (*speech for*): I'll just quickly address the previous question. The Trustee's board can be held to account by a vote of no confidence as all Union officers can be. This motion intends to change the vote of no confidence procedures to be somewhat more accessible to students. But on the more general note, I want to just refer back to the first part of the open letter. We 107 ordinary Members of this Union have been aggrieved.

Well, many of us can't deny that the Robbins Centre is an operator at loss, even if that is not the biggest concern for us and many of us can acknowledge that the Union has been placed into a tough place through circumstances, not necessarily of its own doing. However, what we cannot ignore is a position that we as students, have been left in.

We found out officially, just before the Union General Meeting. However, for months beforehand, the rumours had been circulating that what we have been told is that they were trying to use the secrecy to protect people from worrying about their jobs has been an outright lie. They knew it was out and they had to know it was out.

Everyone that I spoke to knew what was going to happen to our Union. No one allayed the fears that we had. No one tried to tell us what would happen. All we had was this suspicion. These words floating around. Our Sabbatical Officers were elected by us, the ordinary members, and we expect them to represent our interests and to listen to us, so that they know how to represent our interests. We heard nothing from our Sabbatical Officers.

And that is why I submit that this Union must take the extraordinary step, for the first time since the 1970s, to censure our Sabbatical Officers for their failure to do their core duty, of representing our Members. Thank you.

- VPE (*speech against*): I just want to reiterate that from the standpoint of the Sabbatical Officers, which is who is this censure, we had no other viable options at the point that this was taken to Trustee board. And to be honest, I feel like it's a bit unfair to censure just the Sabbs for a Trustee board decision.

When consultations may have happened in previous years, ok, but that wasn't an option for us as Sabbatical Officers now. So that references the censure.

For the vote of no confidence element of the motion. I understand, and I recognise that that the threshold is high, but a vote of no confidence is an exceptional circumstance and therefore it needs to be high, it needs to have an exceptional level of student dissatisfaction to occur.

That has been the process before and it has worked previously.

- OM (*speech for*): I'd really just like to respond to that because I totally appreciate the Sabbatical Officers have been put into a difficult position by the situation and by the financial mismanagement of the Union bar. But I think any Sabbatical Officer would recognise the fact that this isn't just about the Union board, this is about setting a precedent that both the Sabbatical Officers themselves and the Trustee board should be held account by the members of the Students' Union.

The vote of no confidence alteration is a way to do that. I think that fundamentally we have seen almost no transparency from the Trustee board and equally less transparency than we would like from our Sabbatical Officers and that may not be any fault of your own, but it's something that cannot happen again going forward. It is not a personal attack and it's not about personal grudges against any Sabb. It is about the fact that as a Students' Union we should do better for our students and we need to be committed to that. And this motion is committing to that.

- OM (*speech against*): I just want to draw everyone's attention to the second part of the motion concerning the amendment of the vote of no confidence process. So we've all seen in the current news that the vote of no confidence is issued during extreme circumstances, but extreme circumstances alone. The VPE has already outlined that the current and future Sabbatical Officers intend to implement sufficient measures to improve their transparency as representatives of the students. Therefore, there is no requirement for the vote of no confidence to be amended. Once again, these are only issued during extreme circumstances and if this motion passes, the Union will potentially be faced with a new motion of vote of no confidence on a fortnightly basis.

The procedure is meant to be hard to access and having a small number of individuals calling for a vote demonstrates a lack of representation and fails to reflect the broader sentiment or concerns of the students. The amendment of this clause also gives opportunity for actions being raised that are driven by narrow interests or partnerships, rather than the genuine concern or the functioning of the Union. Whilst I can understand and respect the opposition's

arguments in favour of this, reducing the numbers gives opportunity for, for example, a larger soul society or sports team to have a motion called.

Thus giving rise giving rise for the vote to be issued on a more personal rather than professional basis.

Ultimately, making the vote of no confidence easy to access through this motion undermines its credibility, as I've repeatedly stated, it is only meant to be enforced under extreme circumstances. The current sabbatical officers have outlined other ways in which they're going to be held accountable in future, and therefore there is no need for this motion to pass, and hence I would strongly advise everyone in this meeting and externally to vote against it.

- OM (*speech for*): Whilst I do absolutely recognise the fact that the vote of no confidence must occur in exceptional circumstances, I would say that this is fundamentally the trust that we have in our Sabbatical Officers and the democratic functioning of the Students' Unions has started to erode. Yes, they've promised, you know, future forms of accountability and transparency, but those promises have been made before and whilst implemented, have they been done so effectively? I think not.

To state that a mere majority of students can fully sum up the students well, it's a difficult question because do students properly engage with this process at this point? I also think not. Fundamentally, they're disillusion. So if we actually permit access to this function through societies, through means through which they engage directly, as opposed to individually, do we not actually give them a greater chance? There is far more mobilising power and engagement through these groups than there is necessarily through the broad swaths of alliances and single votes that you can actually summon.

- OM (*speech against*): This is a censorship motion that's been brought primarily because the students who've raised the motion have an understandable issue with decisions that were taken by the Trustee board.

The Sabbatical Officers sit in a significant minority on that Trustee board, outnumbered both by external trustees and student trustees.

Even if the Sabbatical Officers had been universally against the Robins solution that we've arrived at, from a board trustee board perspective, it would not have mattered.

So I would strongly urge student colleagues to consider that were censorship is appropriate, that that

ensorship should be tied to the specific tasks and responsibilities associated with each Sabb rather than the Trustee board, where will they may be able to influence, but they fundamentally cannot control. Thank you.

- Motion summation
 - OM: The motion's primarily to prevent decisions like this from being made and establish gradual accountability within our Students' Union. The focus of this motion is not on the votes of no confidence, but still the threshold is very high and this is of concern.

OM I raised a procedural motion as a point of order that this motion be considered in two parts. Considering the sentiments raised by the students, I beg to move that the vote of no confidence and the accountability surgery section is considered and a different vote from the motion of censure.

Basically, acknowledging that students have concerns about the vote of no confidence changes, and however, giving deference to the censure is necessarily a different issue. I beg to move that the motion be voted on in two parts, as in the vote of censure will be separate from the other provisions of the motion.

RW Please raise your hands if you are happy to vote on the motion in two parts (*Part 1: Resolves 1 and Part 2: Resolves 2 and 3*).

More than half of the ordinary members raised their hands.

OM I would like to move that we censure the entire Trustee board based on what we've seen today.

RW I will need to check as that is a constitutional question. Also, I think that might be an amendment so I don't think it can be taken.

Staff Support: It is an amendment and as we did not receive the amendment before the start of the meeting, I don't think it is one of the procedural motions. Yes, it is not a procedural motion, that would have been an amendment. Amendments have closed so we cannot change the content of the motion.

RW: Voting is now open, we'll give it 5 minutes and then we'll have the result.

Time was extended for voting after 5 minutes to allow for a technical issue.

Staff Support: The vote on resolve one falls as it did not hit the 2/3 majority. The vote on resolve two and three regarding accountability and vote of no confidence change passes with more than 50% of the vote.

Motion Resolve 1: FELL
Motion Resolve 2 & 3: PASSED



RW Thank you for your time and for engaging. I hope you have a lovely rest of your day. Goodbye.

Thanks were expressed to RW for chairing this meeting.