



Student Parliament 2

Tuesday 20th October 2020, 17:00 – 19:00

Chair: Kyle McGettigan (Democracy Convenor)

Officers in attendance: Chelbi Hillan (VP Education), Anna McKinley (International Students' Rep), Eilidh Sneddon (VP Sport), Aspen Lynch (Disabled Students Rep), Andrew Merchant (Faculty Rep Science), Rachel Cairns (VP Inclusion), Benn Rapson (VP Welfare), Vinny Williamson (LGBT+ Rep), Kayla-Megan Burns (President), Marc Schachtsiek (Faculty Rep Engineering), Victoria Welsh (Faculty Rep Business)

Staff in attendance: Leo Howes (Head of Student Engagement), Adam Crawley (Policy & Campaigns Co-ordinator)

3 students in attendance

1) Welcome and approval of previous minutes:

Chair welcome comments. No objections to the minutes, which are approved

2) Exec Committee Minutes

Chair welcomes comments to the minutes. No comments received.

Chair asked Exec to speak for a few minutes to go over what they worked on.

Ru: Welcome Month, over 40 events, varied attendance. Managed to include a lot of people who might not have been involved. Also been involved in Centre for Sustainable Development, to get student voice involved. Working with Benn on provisions on campus. Working with Mature Students Association. Looking forward to getting stuck into campaigns and manifesto points.

Rachel: Been working on Black History Month, we have a student forum with Sir Jim McDonald, if you have any thoughts about inclusion at Strathclyde, you can ask the principal questions. Excited to get started on work for the 16 Days of Action and also disability awareness month. Want 16 days to be big. Reminder to everybody to take breaks and look after each other.

Chelbi: The StrathReps project will be launching on 28th October – you can encourage people to become class reps.

Eilidh: Virtual Sports Fair – 600 sign ups to Sport Union. Launched new sports Unions memberships, which is lower. Ran a number of different campaigns, including social media and campaigns workshop. LGBT+ in sports forum went well – outcome being compiled into report, some actions already taking place. Clubs did fundraising for national coming out day. Working with Ru for plans for Movember – competition with Glasgow Uni. All sports were up and running, until 2 weeks suspension. Hopefully, sports should be back on Monday.

Kayla: Working a lot on COVID at the moment, which has a lot of issues for students. A lot of students don't feel like they're getting the experience they've paid for with fees. Issues with accommodation about how to move people back home. Looking at things like Christmas, which is a concern for students. The University haven't been too proactive. Blended learning – discussing



whether everything should be online or not, and whether COVID-19 is a personal circumstance. Lots of correspondence, trying to figure out options working with NUS to try and find a route. The Uni are being reluctant about this, which gives students a limited degree of certainty. Trying to campaign for clarity on the most part. If anyone wants to get involved with the We Stand With Students campaign, let me know. Looking forward to Sem 1 exams, and how Sem 2 might work.

Also, secured fossil fuel divestment - 7% of portfolio to a sustainable investment fund. Working with Chelbi and Ru with stuff on PGRs. Autumn Elections are coming up, make sure you're recommending your mates for any of the roles.

Benn: Working on Action Groups, all have chairs. Cost of learning group - looking at fees. Housing group - looking at Unionising student tenants, working with Student Tenants Organise, meeting on 27th October. Mental Health Group - looking at Mental Health investment and headspace. Organised events for Mental Health Awareness day. Mature Students forum was really useful. Drafted letter to Fresh Student Living about poor standard in Collegelands. Wrote to University on behalf of student staff in nourish. Reformed the Strath union welfare committee. Looking at wellbeing advisor role. VP Website – looking for feedback on the website.

Chair welcomes questions.

3) Policy proposals

a) Students Tenants Union Act (2020)

Benn: working with others to set up a tenants' union. Reemphasises that we have previous policy on this, but since we've passed there's been developments around tenants unions. My role represents students in accommodation – have leverage in halls but not in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) unless we have agreements in place. Acknowledges that development of students tenants' union can apply pressure.

Kyle welcomes comments.

Kayla: Wanted to show support for the proposal, think it would be really beneficial. Lots of students are in PBSAs and this is a form of support we don't have in place in the Union. Lucky we have an effective VP Welfare but for long-term, this would be beneficial. This is a formal route of support.

Chelbi: Students now get 28 days' notice, and this is a good way to campaign on stuff like that. This is a great campaign and is about securing rights for students.

Chair moves to Voting – explains using voting procedure in Zoom chat.

13 votes for, none against. This policy passes.

b) Students Against Sectarianism

Rachel: Alongside Kayla and mine anti-hate campaign. Don't currently have a sectarianism policy, wanted to make some progress alongside equal opportunities policy.

Anna: Just learned what Sectarianism is, not being from the UK, this is something that's unfamiliar to me. Now I've learned about it, I see this all the time. I am voting yes because I think we need to take a stand but I think in the future we should take some time to really dig into what this means, in relation to the zero-tolerance. For example, incidents on social media, don't it to become a slippery slope. A lot that can be added to the policy. There is a lot of discussion around this topic – need to try to figure this out straightaway.

Kayla: Completely hear what you're saying. We're talking about looking at different policies so we can properly discuss things and make sure it's thoroughly thought through. In Glasgow in particular, sectarianism links to other hate crimes as well. There's a lot that needs to be done here, so don't expect this to cover it all, we want to look at this a whole lot more. Right now working with Action Against Prejudice on our anti-hate campaigning, a branch of this is action on sectarianism, which looks at this in Scotland. Hoping to use them to make sure that this is as thorough as possible. This is just the starting point.

Eilidh: Thanks for this, this will link to the equal opportunities and this is a step in the right direction.

Chair: Moves to closing statements.

Rachel: Let's try to make Strathclyde hate free – everyone should feel comfortable on campus and we should be there to support.

Chair moves to a vote

13 votes for, none against. This policy passes.

4) Participation in Student Democracy - Discussion

Chair: This agenda item was brought up by Anna. If you want to add a comment, put your initial in the chat.

Anna: Feel like we had a long discussion last time, and there is probably more things that people want to say. This is something that's evolving with elections and COVID, this is a good time and a good discussion to be having. Still a small turnout to Student Parliament. Still advocating for some reform on the structure of Student Parliament – was keen on the old system, but I'm open to some more accountability. Marc mentioned about student register, so it's all recorded, and not just any random person.

Vinny: I am in favour of how this is now but an idea I had since the last parliament, maybe advocating for students to contact reps more. For example, reps could have open day each month, so then people can bring up issues. E.g. if there's a problem in business, then people can see business rep. I feel like if we were to reform, I would like to move forward – I like the register to vote process though.

Student: I thought the suggestion about having surgeries is a good idea, we don't have much like that. More communication with students will be positive. Don't have any drastic radical proposals but again, I feel that there is a valid concern, if this isn't as representative as it could be. Surgeries are one way, voting registration is another way. I still like the idea of class reps being invited to speak, but will need to iron out the cracks. I think the conversation is moving in the right direction, no system is perfect – will need to try to compromise.

Chair: Quite like the system of registration – this sorts out the issue about abusive behaviours in parliament. This means people have to take personal responsibility for their votes.

Marc: Still stand by registration. Something to consider would be to do this before papers are shared, so people don't just sign up for specific purpose. But encouraging people to come along would also be great. Like the idea of increasing communication – there may be certain issues around how people can influence votes. E.g. people may not come to me as engineering reps.

Chair: I think that allowing systems where students can vote is better. If you want to have a representative student parliament, there needs to be legitimacy, or it needs to be open to everyone. If they breach equal opportunities or be disruptive, then they are asked to leave.

Chelbi: Generally quite open to the idea, been doing representation since starting university. Using rep system which already exists is useful, this means people have more of a duty to represent constituency. If just giving voting right back to everyone, it kind of depends how clued in you are really. Sometimes, being a member of student parliament comes with another level of involvement – but even if people aren't members, they still have useful experience. Even if this means we need to provide more support on how to get people to vote.

Benn: Registration system is a good idea. I don't think it's that far away from what we had before than what we have now – at the old system, you still had to sign in, if something serious happened, these people would still be penalised. Marc made a point about not just having people register to vote through one policy and then walk out – this happened previously, and then people would leave and fall below quorum. Anna right to note that student turnout from non-elected students has fallen at this meeting. At second parliament last year, we didn't meet quorum, but there were more non-elected students. When we did reach quorum, we tended to reach it by quite a bit – but only about issues that people were passionate about e.g. HaSS Zero Marks Parliament. We have to change something – this got voted in by a referendum, which covered lots of different things like forum. Last time, I said I'd be a hypocrite if I said that I was in favour of this position as I wasn't before. The reason I think we have to make some changes is because even though it was a referendum, Kyle was elected on a manifesto that got more votes in the other direction. There needs to be some change. I think that maybe it would be better to spin this off into a working group of interested students, which would be a mixture of reps and students, which would then bring a solution back to parliament.

Chair: A registration system does make sense, and more protection in parliament would be good.

Anna: I agree with making a working group – I wanted to bring this up as we didn't get chance to decide something last time. Discussing the Referendum – as a politics student, and as someone who works on a state wide campaign, I learned a lot of voting trends etc. The fact it was a yes-yes referendum, the way it was structured may have been leading. I like Vinny's idea with the communication with Reps – the Union page would need to do more to be advertised. Agrees that Parliament is a step up from other things, but I don't think that people should be excluded from any discussions. Being a student at this alone, and I also think people should vote on whatever you want.

Chair: There should be more channels for people to talk to their reps – I do think it's better that people have the right to vote themselves.

Student: There seems to be movement of all sides in relation to compromise. Note Chelbi's point that reps are involved in different discussions that have to be taken into consideration. 13 people does not represent 22,000 – because the voting turnout isn't high. When we mention legitimacy in elections, we need to have an understanding that they will never be 100% representative and may need to look at other models. Bicameral chamber could be an option – so having a primary and secondary chamber where class reps and sports reps might have a view. E.g. I was in favour of sectarianism bill, but I find it bizarre that there wasn't any representation from religions and football supporters groups – so these groups should be here.

Chair: Good that people have acknowledged compromise and issues.

Kayla: Around the point about reps not being representative – I think that we physically cannot represent everybody, but I think it is everyone’s responsibility to do the job properly, and then students have the ability to hold us to account. For example, proposing a vote of no confidence. It’s not always possible to do this for example, exec is all white so we need to work closely to amplify opinions from BAME Communities. It’s our jobs to try to represent people and if we aren’t doing it, it’s a failure on our behalf. If we take representation seriously, then us doing that and voting and trying to do our jobs is more effective. There are still risks in relation to people from different communities warping voting – e.g. if homophobic people vote on an issue that directly affects LGBT students. Sometimes reps won’t properly represent people, but that’s when we need to hold people to account.

Chair: If we give student more powers to vote in parliament, then that’s probably the best way to do it. There are ways we can alleviate some of the issues. I don’t think Parliament will allow things to vote that will be in opposition to policies.

Kayla: I think I was talking more about people voting against progressive policies. We’ve seen things like this happen before. We saw people with strong views warp voting, including bullying and negative behaviours. I think thorough representation and good reps is important.

Chair: I don’t think there’s no better way to hold exec to account by allowing people to vote

Vinny raises concerns about chair contributing to this discussion. Chair notes that they can contribute to discussions.

Marc: Reps do represent more students. If we do get people to register – could we get these to be more representative? Should we try to get people to represent others to some degree? This might be more.

Anna: What I wanted to follow up on – there was a big movement to push the vote for CO2 emission, and the fact that this was underneath this proposal shows how little support for their was. I know that we can easily make the argument to bring back the old system. Once again I would like to say that Democracy Convenor, so he has a right to speak on this, so it’s important to let him speak on this.

Benn: This is an interesting conversation, and we’ve been having it for years. I think we’re conflating a lot of different issues – this is problem we’ve had previously. Changing election systems is not always enough – the Union itself has an engagement problem. Other Unions get lots of people e.g. Edinburgh. Things can also get heated under both systems – based on who showed up. Code of conduct etc. is important. We have different perspectives based on how people have engaged with Parliament previously – e.g. my first parliament was exec ignoring attendees. I think round table format is the way to go but we do have to change something. Think this should be left to the students. Important to respect each other’s views and positions to make a change. The voting system isn’t just the only reason why this it’s not working as well as it could be.

Student: Agree with what Benn says about respecting other peoples’ opinion. I didn’t mean that I was trying to undermine the work of reps – I think the work that Exec and Non-Exec do is really important. I do still think that the numbers aren’t good but we can try to improve it, and 13 very hard working reps still might not be representative. Marc has made some good points – getting more reps to speak and coalitions of support is important as well. I think a working group is a very important suggestion. I agree with the points about referendums and election turnouts – though there is clear evidence that student parliament is not working, though people are still trying hard.



We could adapt and combine a parliament that's more representative. Worth looking at other Unions to address. Been a lot more compromise and progressive suggestions.

Chair: Stirling Union has open Parliament with a quota of 60, for 12,000 students. So why can Stirling Uni pack Parliament but we're not. There's more than that, and we can look at all of these things – there are some things we can do now.

Eilidh: Clubs and Societies reps aren't reps necessarily, Sports Union has constitutional things to stop things possible

Aspen: I don't think anyone is against engagement, but Parliament is not very aware by students. People were more engaged in annual election than people voting than people were aware of Parliament change but knew about elections.

Zoe: To add onto what Aspen was saying, knowing I couldn't vote and Parliament wasn't very well publicised. One thing we need to do is better advertising – should be sending out more information about what is coming forward, then asking what opinion is that way, so then we can get them to inform us.

Chair: Overwhelming support for some form of working group. Notes all attendees are interested in attending

Kayla: I'm conscious of that as Democracy Convenor to facilitate discussions in student parliament. Would it be better for you or other student to chair so you can get more fully involved in working group? I know a lot of people are keen to participate but there could be more people.

Chair: Could perhaps have member of Union staff facilitating the discussion.

Anna: We don't need to commit to responsibilities and things right now.

Chair: Will look to send out dates with the minutes

5) Any Other Competent Business

Benn: Should probably have a conduct policy brought to the next policy.

Rachel: Has been working on this and has tried to get it on previous parliament meetings.

Chair closes meeting. Thanks for everyone coming along.