

The National Council of the Union of Students in Ireland

Minutes

National Council USI, NC54.6

Dublin Institute of Technology ~ Cathal Brugha Street

9th November, 2013

Chairperson:

Julian de Spáinn

Deputy Chairperson:

Richard Hammond

NAMES APPEARING ON THE ATTENDANCE LIST:

(No liability accepted for difficulties deciphering manuscript notations)

CITSU

Danny O'Donovan

Cíara O'Connor

DITSU

Glenn FitzPatrick

Rebecca Dempsey

GMITSU

Sam O'Neill

ITCSU

Sandy Duane

Ian Hannon

ITTSU

Karen Sheahan

Martina Quirke

Michael Buckley

MSU

Aidan McNally

NCISU

James Duffy

NUIGSU

Seán Kearns

Declan Higgins

Catherine Breslin

TCDSU

Tom Lenihan

Jack Leahy

UCCSU

Gavin Lynch-Frahill

Annie Hoey

WITSU

Stephen O'Rourke

David Walsh

Bord na nOifigeach, AMLÉ

Joe O'Connor, President

Denise McCarthy, Deputy President and Vice President for Welfare
Cat O'Driscoll, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance
Laura Harmon, Vice President for Equality and Citizenship
Paddy Guiney, Vice President for Campaigns
Ciara Guinan, Vice President for the Southern Region
Kevin Donoghue, Vice President for the Border, Midlands and Western Region
Rebecca Hall, Vice President for the Northern Region
Feidhlim Seoighe, Vice President for the Irish Language/Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge

NAMES FOR WHOM APOLOGIES WERE OFFERED TO THE MEETING:

(CO Presidents/Delegate Leaders/Officer Board Only)

Daniel Coulter, AITSU; Pdraig Sheehan, ITCSU; Podge Haughney, UCCSU.

Preliminary

Ben Archibald, General Manager USI; Stephen Murtagh of Deal Effect; and Deborah Costello of Saint Vincent de Paul were authorised to attend the meeting. The agenda was adjusted by unanimous agreement to allow the respective presentations from Stephen Murtagh and Deborah Costello to proceed at the beginning of the meeting.

7. Items for Discussion

7(a) Presentation from Stephen Murtagh, Deal Effect

Stephen Murtagh gave a presentation outlining the background to Deal Effect and explaining how MOs can participate to mutual benefit.

7(d) Christmas Campaign ~ Toy Appeal & Community Events

Deborah Costello gave a presentation outlining the background to the Christmas Toy Appeal and explaining how MOs can participate. WITSU suggested that a Google Doc be circulated so that MOs could input the relevant information and NUIGSU sought a list of appropriate and inappropriate toys. It was agreed that these would be provided.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting which occurred at National College of Ireland in October 2013 were proposed by the President, seconded by the ITTSU **and passed without objection.**

2. Matters Arising

None.

3. Pre-Nominated Any Other Business

- (a) Discontinuation of interaction between USI and Drink Aware.
- (b) Potentially restrictive amendments to the Freedom of Information Act.
- (c) Mandated update from President regarding USI's finances.
- (d) Gratitude of TCDSU's President.

4. Officer Reports

The Vice President for the Northern Region had nothing to add to her report as circulated save to mention the FE Festival which occurred recently. She explained that this is an event to train SU officers in FEs about how to be good officers and how to participate well in the wider student movement. There were no questions.

The Vice President for the Border, Midlands and Western Region had nothing to add to his report as circulated. There were no questions.

The Vice President for Equality and Citizenship had nothing to add to her report as circulated save to thank the volunteer chairpersons who assisted with the recent HEA Access Conference. There were no questions.

The Vice President for Academic Affairs & Quality Assurance had nothing to add to her report as circulated. ITTSU noted that though the report mentioned that communication from SUSI is improving, there remains significant scope for improvement.

The Vice President for the Southern Region had nothing to add to her report as circulated save to mention attendance at the National Teaching Learning Forum. There were no questions.

The Vice President for Campaigns had nothing to add to his report as circulated save to thank NCISU for its help with the Mental Health Campaign. There were no questions.

The Deputy President & Vice President for Welfare had nothing to add to her report as circulated. There were no questions.

The President had nothing to add to his report as circulated. CITSU enquired as to whether the President considered the faint shadow above his upper lip to be a moustache. The President declined to respond while glancing at the questioner with a countenance teeming with conflicted tenors of exasperation and bemusement.

5. Items for Information

5(a) National Teaching Awards

The VPAA&QA mentioned that a Think Tank had met on the preceding Tuesday. The meeting was very participative and generated a lot of ideas. She indicated that selecting a name for the teaching awards remained extant and asked MOs to send any suggestions for a meaningful and gender neutral name to the Education Working Group or to her personally.

5(b) Bodywhys

The DP&VPW noted that USI is supporting a Bodywhys survey relating to eating disorders. Five surveys have been circulated broken down into collections of colleges. Data from the survey will be available on both an overall and institutional level helping to develop future polices. She thanked all who have promoted the survey for their assistance.

5(c) More Talk, More Action

The DP&VPW confirmed that the USI Mental Health Campaign will be launched on the following Monday at NCI by retired Munster Rugby legend and mental health advocate Alan Quinlan. Twenty thousand “Chats for Change” packs will be circulated. The campaign has been well supported with Tea Bags from Lyons Tea and funding from See Change. Low cost pens have been secured for inclusion in the pack containing health promotion information. The DP&VPW implored MOs to promote the campaign widely.

5(d) Pink Training

The VPE&C advised the meeting that plans are well advanced for this year’s Pink Training which will occur on the following weekend in Belfast. With 370 people attending, this year’s event will be the biggest Pink Training ever. Registration will be open on Friday from 16:00 to 18:00 and the event will close on Sunday at 14:00.

ITTSU noted that its LGBT society is having difficulties regarding attendance at the event given the distance to be covered and the cost of travel, with little or no funding available locally. ITTSU also noted that the information regarding the event arrived during its mid-term break which impeded prospective participation. It also enquired as to how many participants from Northern Ireland attended last year's Pink Training.

The VPE&C confirmed that places for ITTSU continue to be reserved should the difficulties be overcome. She explained that an open call went out to all MOs and that the number of potentially suitable venues is limited given the size of the event. She estimated that last year *circa* thirty attendees from UUSU and QUBSU attended Pink Training.

5(e) Update on Taskforce for Volunteering & Citizenship

The VPE&C noted that the Taskforce was established pursuant to a mandate from Annual Congress and has been very active with involvement in the Seanad Éireann referendum campaign, SERD, voter participation, community engagement and the preparation of policy. She invited MOs that have any suggestions or ever wish to be updated regarding the work of the Taskforce to contact her.

6. Items for Agreement

6(a) Value of Education Campaign

DITSU proposed the adoption of the Value of Education Campaign Discussion Document which had been previously circulated. This was seconded by the President. ITTSU opined that while it supports the motion it is unhappy with certain elements of the text and language of the document which it considers to be unprofessional. The Chairperson put the proposal to the meeting **which was passed without objection.**

6(b) Grant Reform ~ Estranged Parents

UCCSU proposed that the President and the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance before January 2014 arrange a meeting between the Higher Education Authority and a selection of independent students (one per Member Organisation) under the age of 23 years to discuss the development of a fairer system for independent students under the age of 23 years to receive SUSI funding and to discuss how any such system can be implemented.

This was seconded by the President who commented that this topic must be included in the Grant Reform paper. The availability of students affected by this issue will assist in proving the need for reform. WITSU observed that this topic gives rise to *circa* 30% of the casework undertaken by its Vice President for Education. ITTSU suggested that the motion should be tied in more specifically to the VPAA&QA who responded that this will be a key feature of the Grant Reform paper, the production of which is mandated.

The Chairperson put the proposal to the meeting **which was passed without objection.**

6(c) VAT reform on Library Journals

DITSU proposed that the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Quality Assurance of USI would work with the Library Association of Ireland and other interested parties to lobby the Minister for Education and other relevant bodies for reform of this tax code to better represent the benefits of online media over print journals to the education sector.

This was seconded by the President and **passed without objection.**

6(d) Memorandum of Understanding with Conradh na Gaeilge

The Chairperson relinquished his role to the Deputy Chairperson for this agenda item.

The Vice President for the Irish Language/Leas Uachtarán don Ghaeilge formally proposed the motion to adopt the Memorandum of Understanding between USI and Conradh na Gaeilge, before immediately proposing a Procedural Motion 9(d) that the motion be deferred to the meeting of National Council in December, 2013. The Procedural Motion 9(d) was seconded by the President and **passed unanimously.**

6(e) Y=S Campaign

The VPE&C withdrew this item from the agenda pending finalisation of the content of campaign material.

6(f) Congress Director

The President proposed that Ben Archibald, General Manager USI be appointed Congress Director for USI Annual Congress 2014. This was seconded by the DP&VPW and **passed unanimously.**

7. Items for Discussion (continued)

7(b) USI Member Services Limited update

The President, with input from the General Manager, gave a presentation regarding the ongoing endeavours toward income diversification being undertaken by USI Member Services Limited. WITSU noted that a lot of work is being done and expressed its satisfaction with the progress made.

7(c) SUSI update

The VPAA&QA noted that a board meeting will occur on the following Monday at which a comprehensive update should be received. So far, SUSI asserts that applications are being processed in a timely fashion and in a manner that runs close to the old VEC timelines for application processing. She noted that she is aware of issues with students from IT Tralee and GMIT and that those or any other MOs with issues should feed into the forum or directly to her.

NUIGSU noted that SUSI may be improving this year but remains unhelpful regarding last year citing a local instance where the Ombudsman would not take the case and SUSI would not assist. The VPAA&QA noted that if all relevant appeals have been made then legal action, should a basis for same exist, is probably the only remaining option.

7(e) USI Annual Congress 2014 update

The General Manager gave a presentation regarding USI Annual Congress 2014 during which the President announced that the venue will be the Sheraton Hotel in Athlone and that the event will occur during the week commencing 31st March, 2014. The General Manager provided an overview of the venue's facilities before confirming that the cost per delegate has been reduced from €305 in 2013 to €270 in 2014. This reduction has been negotiated despite a general uplift in conferencing costs across the hospitality sector.

UCCSU noted that members of its delegation with special dietary requirements had not fared well at last year's venue and the General Manager confirmed that the facilitation of special dietary requirements has already been raised with the Sheraton Hotel and no difficulty is expected.

TCDSU commended the cost reduction. UCCSU noted that the sports event at S.U.T. was a success and suggested that some entertainment unrelated to the hotel bar should be considered. ITCSU supported this suggestion while WITSU observed that many activities may occur in a hotel bar other than the consumption of alcohol.

The General Manager explained that the selection of entertainment for USI Annual Congress rests with Officer Board to which any suggestions should be submitted and the President confirmed his agreement with the desirability of some non-alcohol related entertainment, perhaps of an evening rather than at night, when remaining within the hotel would be more sensible.

The President also noted that while status as a fair trade hotel was a consideration, this venue though not a fair trade hotel, is by far the best value for delegates from the selection of venues available. The hotel has been asked to look into the possibility of becoming a fair trade hotel. The General Manager mentioned that the hotel gave comfort in this regarding on the basis that it is a family owned local business that has never had any disputes with staff.

8. Any Other Business

The DP&VPW proposed that USI abandon all interaction with Drink Aware. She explained that Drink Aware is funded by the alcohol industry and no funding, support or training is provided to USI under the current relationship. She noted that USI is not assisting with Drink Aware’s competition this year and that Drink Aware is getting very active with local students’ unions and/or clubs & societies and/or institutional staff contacts. The motion was seconded by IT Tralee which observed that until ties are cut with Drink Aware, USI will not be able to have its own campaign.

The President asserted that Drink Aware is effectively Diageo. Therefore it completely lacks credibility to be attempting to develop an alcohol awareness campaign with the organisers of the Arthur’s Day drinking festival. CITSU agreed noting that while Drink Aware might reach some bare minimum level of corporate social responsibility, USI can be much more robust in its campaigning if independent. CITSU also noted that there is a public relations opportunity for promoting the USI campaign through highlighting the severing of ties with Drink Aware. DITSU asked the President to commit his well articulated thoughts on the matter to writing and circulate same to MOs.

UCCSU raised a Point of Order regarding the discussion of this topic as a matter of “Any Other Business” when MOs had not been forewarned through the agenda. The Chairperson explained that as the issues have arisen through a Welfare Working Group meeting since the deadline for submission of items for the agenda it is procedurally acceptable to discuss and vote on the motion. The Chairperson noted that the usual procedural motions are available to any MO that considers the use of same to be appropriate in relation to this or any other discussion.

The DP&VPW summated, observing that the motion does not purport to bind individual MOs, while encouraging MOs to follow a similar approach noting previous instances where Drink Aware had sidelined local students’ unions.

The Chairperson put the proposal to the meeting **which was passed without objection.**

DITSU noted that there has been some concern raised in recent days that potential amendments to the Freedom of Information Act could result in a more restrictive regime of access to information. The President is to obtain more information and will consider whether any action is necessary.

ITTSU sought clarity as to when the quarterly report from the President regarding USI finances as mandated by USI Annual Congress will be made available. The President confirmed that a report will be produced for information to the next meeting of National Council.

TCDSU's president noted his personal appreciation for the support he had received from his National Council colleagues during recently difficulties and offered the room a collective hug.

The President urged all present to attend the Young People's Assembly, which is to occur at Liberty Hall at 12:00 following the meeting.

The Chairperson thanked DITSU for hosting the meeting, thanked all present for their participation, and closed the meeting.