

## minutes

Meeting:	Postgraduate Assembly
Date:	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2018
Paper:	Postgraduate Assembly Autumn 18 – 2 (PGAA200)
Author:	Alexandros Efstratiou
Purpose:	Record of Decision Making

uea|su

### Minutes of the Postgraduate Assembly 16<sup>th</sup> October 2018

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**Assembly members present:** 38 voting members

**Chair:** Anush Rajagopal (LAW)

**Apologies:** Martin Marko (Postgraduate Education Officer)

**In attendance:** Josh Clare (Head of Campaigns), Josh Melling (Postgraduate Engagement Coordinator), Alexandros Efstratiou (Advocacy Assistant)

**PGAA201 Introduction to the assembly**

-The chair welcomes everyone to the assembly, and explains what will be discussed. They explain their role and introduce some staff members that work within pg(su).

**PGAA202 Results of the Postgraduate Democracy Elections**

-AR goes over the posts that were up for election, and who was voted in these positions.

**PGAA203 Open Discussion**

-AR explains the points that were suggested for discussion, and also mentions that an emergency motion was sent for discussion at the meeting. They suggest that the discussion points are covered first, before the motion. The assembly concurs.

**a. Common study spaces in the library**

-Assembly members suggest:

- Introducing postgraduate-specific group study spaces.
- Installing fans in the group study spaces, especially for the summer months.
- Increasing the capacity of group study spaces, as most are for very small groups.

-AR thanks the assembly for their ideas and states that if they have further suggestions, they could send e-mails to the chair of assembly, to the Postgraduate Education Officer, or to JM.

-An assembly member asks whether a survey will be going out to ask for suggestions. AR states that this could definitely happen and that it has been used before as a tool to facilitate change.

**b. Future activities hosted by postgraduate(su).**

-AR asks the assembly to review past events provided on the agenda and evaluate them. They also ask the assembly to provide suggestions for future events.

-JM states that there is a section on the SU website for PGs to suggest event ideas.

-No further suggestions made by the assembly.

**c. Usage of resources at the PG community's disposal**

-AR goes over the budget available to pg(su), and how that budget is split. They explain that this is decided by the committee.

- There is a question from the assembly as to whether conference fund could be extended to include international conferences, in terms of its maximum cap.
- An assembly member asks how many people usually apply for the conference fund. JM clarifies that it can vary. They state that it was 20 last year, but there were even more in previous years.
- An assembly member states that the conference fund is primarily for PGRs, and it therefore may be a bit unfair towards PGTs that a big proportion of the funding is going towards it.
- Another assembly member responds that conferences are now a key part of the PGR experience and they are central to PhDs if they want to network and find employability. Therefore, given that such funding is no longer given by faculties, this is the only support that PGRs can turn to.
- An assembly member explains that the conference fund can also be useful to PGTs, as some must also attend professional seminars and bodies in order to remain in good standing.
- JM clarifies that the conference fund is open to both PGR and PGT students, and that it can also be used for research. For example, if a piece of research requires travelling expenses, the conference fund can go towards covering those expenses.
- AR, as the chair, asks for any objections towards them opining on the topic. There are no objections.
- AR states that the PG committee is not an academic board, and therefore they have reservations regarding PG funding going towards academic projects.
- An assembly member believes that the job of pg(su) is to assist and represent PG students with any issues, regardless of their nature.

**PGAA204      Pizza and Drinks**

- This item is postponed until the dispersion of the assembly into social spaces, to discuss other pending matters.

**PGAA205      Any other business**

- AR asks whether the assembly has any objections to hearing the emergency motion. No objections.
- AR reads out the emergency motion, which is a motion of no confidence towards the PG committee, based on the claim that PG elections were not in accordance with the union's bye-laws (Appendix A). SJ is identified as the motion's seconder.
- AR also notifies the assembly of their right of no confidence towards the PG Education Officer, however they state that this would require a meeting of a special quorum of 104 PG students.
- There is a question from the assembly as to whether the motion is suggesting that the election process and results were not made public on the SU website.
- SJ states that both they and some of their friends nominated themselves, but did not know how elections work. They state

that they were not aware of the procedures or rules, and that there should have been a better way of informing candidates around the process.

-Another member states that it is very difficult to find the terms and conditions, and that they felt nominees were not given a chance to explain their vision.

-An assembly member states that they did not know when the election was taking place or what the deadlines were, despite looking around the website.

-Another assembly member states that they did not know elections were going on, and although they wanted to run for them, they could not nominate themselves in time.

-An assembly member states that it was actually PGRs that were disadvantaged against PGTs, not the other way around like the motion claims, as they joined 10 days after PGTs, and had not even finished induction by the time that elections were taking place.

-Another member inquires as to who the deputy returning officer was.

-AR states that there was no deputy returning officer, which was another flaw in the election process. Upon a question from the assembly as to how the election ended up happening, AR explains that the PG Education Officer took it upon themselves to hold the elections, and that is another reason that they feel it was invalid.

-The member inquires whether the PG Education Officer is admitting that they made a mistake. AR concurs that this is the case.

-The assembly expresses a wish to call upon SU staff members in the room to explain the process, however both JM and JC state that they cannot speak about these matters in PG representative bodies, as they are restricted by staff protocol.

-Another assembly member states that the point about a deputy returning officer not existing is not true, as they remember there being one.

-A member states that this would mean the assembly would be voting blind, and they suggest waiting until the next assembly to vote, when matters would be made clearer.

-AR states that they cannot opine on this, but it can be left up to the assembly.

-Another assembly member states that although they appreciate the assembly's concerns that the process was confusing, it was something that was confusing to everyone, even people who were eventually voted, as processes are such that they are not easily comprehended by people that are not incredibly involved in student politics. They also state that PGRs and PGTs are part of a single body, not separate, and should therefore work in unity.

-SJ states that they went into the SU office to ask for information regarding the elections, specifically about how many positions they could run for. They state that the information they were given at the office was discrepant with information that

was on the website, and information was inconsistent between these two sources and briefs that they were later given by other officers.

-AR inquires whether this is in relation to election rules or the fairness of elections. SJ clarifies that it relates to both, as they were also told to prepare a speech, but did not have a chance to present their speech at the assembly where voting was held.

-An assembly member asks the chair to repeat the point in the motion in relation to the representation of PGRs and PGTs in the committee. AR repeats this part.

-Another assembly member states that they were present at election, and a manifesto was displayed for every candidate that was standing. They therefore believe that the point about candidates not being given an opportunity to make their points is not true.

-Another member states that there were issues with the advertising of elections, as very few people knew they were actually going on.

-A member states that because of the many issues raised with the election, it would make sense to take corrective measures.

-An assembly member states that they completely understand the confusion and the possibility of errors having been made, however they support that they would be going into a vote blind and suggest waiting to decide on this until more information is available.

-AR states that the member can propose a motion to delay the vote, which would have to be approved with a 50% majority.

-Another member seconds this opinion, as they believe that matters are not clear enough without further investigation, and the candidates themselves are not at fault.

-An assembly member supports that there is no reason to delay this motion as it would mean that the next assembly would not be able to focus on new activities.

-A member responds that people cannot vote if they don't understand exactly why they're voting, as that would be blind voting.

-AR states that they had a speech from a candidate who felt that they did not have enough of an opportunity to represent and stand for themselves in this election.

-AR states that the assembly can vote on the motion to delay the vote, which would need a majority of 50% to pass.

-There is a discussion regarding clarifications of what type of motion this would be. JC clarifies that this would be a procedural motion, and there would be a speech for, as well as a speech against, if someone wishes to speak against it.

-AR states that each speech can have two minutes to speak for or against delaying the vote.

-AR asks the assembly for anybody willing to speak for and against delaying the vote.

### **Speech 1 for (MC):**

-The speaker states that if there were problems with the election, they should definitely be tackled. However, the assembly is unaware of what the issues actually were. They state that the emergency motion came from the PG Education Officer, who is a respectable figure, but at the same time there is uncertainty around issues such as the deputy returning officer. They state that this is a case of people calling a foul, however it's unknown what the defense would be. They state that voting now would be an inappropriate way of running a committee, and they further explain that two of the committee members are not present, while the other committee members would not be prepared to answer this as it was an emergency motion. They state that, in their experience as a Union Councillor, they believe this should be an issue raised with the deputy returning officer, and the DRO should then respond to the committee. At present, the assembly does not have the evidence or the information, and therefore cannot vote.

### **Speech 1 against (AA):**

-The speaker states that the fundamental principle of every election is that people make an informed choice about their potential leaders, and where their money is allocated. They state that, from statements in the room, it is clear that this has not happened, and it is irrelevant whose fault this is. They continue by explaining that the right processes were not followed, and it makes sense to follow the procedures again. If the same leaders are elected, that would just result in more confidence that they were elected representatively and fairly. They finish by saying that this is the emotion that arises from the room.

### **Speech 2 for (MC):**

-The speaker expresses complete agreement with the opposition speech, and also agrees that the process was unfair. However, there is still no evidence from the deputy returning officer, and therefore voting now would mean that the assembly would be making the same mistakes twice. A more suitable way of proceeding would be to get the deputy returning officer to explain what happened, and what can be improved upon. If it is shown that the DRO was not impartial, then the assembly could proceed with voting. They finish by saying that this is an important issue for postgraduates, and that no vote can be taken without knowing what's happening.

### **Speech 2 against (AA):**

-The speaker states that, upon calling on the DRO, the issues with the election would be made evident and therefore the assembly would simply return to vote on this issue again. They

state that this is simply an opportunity for re-elections in a better way, and suggest that another meeting should be held, where a different set of questions is answered, taking the DRO's input into account.

-AR allows two questions to each speaker.

-SJ states that there was an undemocratic procedure followed which resulted in the election, and therefore delaying it further to vote on the issue in the next assembly would push back a lot of pending matters. MC objects that this is a point, not a question. AR invalidates the question.

-An assembly member expresses their concern about MC's focus on the deputy returning officer. They state that casting a vote of no-confidence in a committee that is just starting is a big democratic issue, and they ask whether that's the way it should be.

-MC responds by saying that the DRO should go to committee first, and if they feel that committee should not stay in office, they should present to the assembly about why they feel that a vote of no-confidence is necessary.

-No questions to AA.

-There is a question about whether MC feels that a delay in the vote simply to check if procedures have been followed, when procedures themselves may be problematic, would be counterproductive.

-MC states that one of the main issues with PG voting are that lots of the people that vote are no longer at the university after a while. They also state that very early voting, as is happening now, does not allow for ideas to get developed. They continue to explain that there is a lot of scope for improvement, and this can be improved through the assembly for subsequent years, as it is too late for the present year. They further state that it is important for bodies to adhere to protocol, as it is the only way to ensure that committee and assembly are running effectively. They also explain that these protocols have been put in place by previous assemblies, and it would be undemocratic to hold new elections simply because people did not like the previous one.

-There is a question from the assembly about whether it is not a problem that AA feels that there is no new information to be revealed from closer inspection, and that the assembly should not get together again.

-AA states that they don't have an issue with the assembly getting together again, and that they simply feel that a lot of issues have already been raised, so they don't have to be raised again. They believe that this is an opportunity for this year's postgraduates to step up and make a change.

-MC states that they would like to present their proposal.

-AR states that MC has already made their point.

-MC explains that they simply stated that they wish to delay the vote, not what they are delaying it to or what they wish to come out of it.

-AR states that they will go forward with voting.

- An assembly member objects that the chair would need very deliberate reason to do this, as this is a huge democratic issue. They state that casting a vote of no confidence within an assembly that does not understand the issues surrounding the motion is not democracy.
- AR states that this is something that is allowed within the bye-laws. They thank the member for their thoughts and initiates voting on whether to pass the procedural vote to delay the motion.
- There are some objections from the assembly, and MC states that that was not what they proposed.
- AR states that they will give MC one more chance to specifically outline their motion.
- MC proposes that having a vote of no confidence at the present meeting would ignore bye-laws that are already in place, as the DRO did not have a chance to make a case to the committee. They state that the assembly does not have the power to ignore or change bye-laws at the present stage.
- An assembly member states that this point cannot be ignored.
- Another assembly member states that they believe there is a bye-law that allows the assembly to vote on this issue.
- AR, after consultation with JC, asks the speakers to return to their seats and explains the procedural motion, which is to transfer the vote to a different body and follow different deliberation.
- They open voting on this motion.

For: 5  
 Against: 28  
 Abstentions: 1

- AR asks JM and JC if there are any procedural issues with what the assembly is currently doing. JC clarifies that the assembly can vote for no-confidence on individual committee members, but not the committee as a whole.
- Following a question from the assembly, JC clarifies that the PG assembly cannot make decisions about the validity of elections. An assembly member states that what is being questioned in the discussion is not the committee, but the election.
- AR states that they were opening a motion of no confidence on individual committee members, not the committee.
- Another member states that AR would be doing this on the basis of elections, not the committee members themselves.
- AR states that it is based upon the claim that elected representatives were elected unfairly.
- Another assembly member states that JC has clarified that the assembly cannot have a vote on electoral procedures, but they are within their rights of casting a vote of no-confidence against committee members.
- Another member states that the issues in the motion stemmed from election procedures in the SU, and the committee can look at those issues, however it is not fair to no-confidence the



committee based on this. The member states that, after clarification that the assembly cannot vote on elections, the chair is now going to the next best thing which is no confidence in individual committee members, which is not right.

-Another assembly member states that the assembly should simply vote on the issue to see what each individual person thinks.

-AR initiates the motion of no confidence in individual committee members, as well as on the chair of assembly:

**Anush Rajagopal (committee member position)**

For: 6

Against: 13

Abstain: 10

**Saket Jalan**

For: 3

Against: 9

Abstain: 12

**James McLean**

For: 12

Against: 5

Abstain: 8

**Charlotte Hallagan**

For: 9

Against: 4

Abstain: 11

**Andrea James**

For: 8

Against: 5

Abstain: 10

**Anush Rajagopal (assembly chair position)**

For: 2

Against: 22

Abstain: 5

Committee and chair of assembly remain as they are, as 2/3 majority is not reached on any of the votes.

**PGAA206 Any other business**

-Nothing to declare.

**Time, date and place of next meeting**

6pm, Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> October, Bookable Room 6

## Appendix

### *Emergency motion issued to the Chair of Assembly*

Dear Chair of the Graduate Assembly,

Please accept this emergency item on the Assembly's agenda on 16/10/2018, and please accept my apologies for not attending this meeting in person, as I am currently travelling to a conference in Manchester (Quality Matters 2018). I nominate the seconder of the motion to defend any issues regarding this as I will not be present.

Motion of no confidence in PG Committee

Proposer: Martin Marko

Secunder: Saket Jalan

Notes:

The reason for this emergency item is the fact that the previous Assembly elections were not held in accordance with the Bye-Laws, specifically the Bye-Laws:

5.4 on election rules (election rules were not published in advance of the election)

5.7 on support and guidance for candidates (details of support and guidance for candidates were not advertised prior to election period)

5.9 on the fairness of elections (PGT students were unfairly disadvantaged by the immediate nomination period against PGR students)

5.11 on campaigning rules (election campaigning rules were not published prior to election)

5.20 on questioning candidates (an opportunity was not provided to ask questions)

5.24 on objections to standing candidates (should any member have objections to a candidate standing, this should be made in writing prior to the election)

Believes:

This means that the elected representatives were elected unfairly, and noting that the elected Committee members are all PGR students but one, also seems unfair to the majority of the PG body – the PGT students. The composition of this Committee is likely to negatively affect the majority of all Postgrads at UEA; so I urge the Chair of Assembly to address this.

Resolves:

I would like to call upon the Assembly to pass a motion of no confidence of all Committee members that were elected at previous Assembly, re-open nominations for at least 3 working days and hold online elections open to all PG students over at least X days, and for these to be properly conducted in accordance with the Bye-Laws, upholding PG democracy.