

Discussion on Proposed Standing Orders for Union Council and its Subcommittees

Owen Heaney, Council Chair 2017-18

31/08/2017

Introduction

Council is the highest representative body in the Union, empowered to represent the voice and views of our Members and set Policy binding on the whole Union. However, although its composition, powers and responsibilities are well laid-out in the Constitution and Bye-Laws, there is currently no formal written reference for the procedure by which meetings are to be conducted and the rights and duties of those attending.

In recent years, Council has effectively operated by convention, with each Chair leading a brief training session at the start of the new year for new members being the only reference for what the rules are. While this has advantages in terms of flexibility of procedure, it can also lead to confusion as to what is and is not permitted and, in some cases, perceptions of bias on the part of the Chair. Neither of these are beneficial for the good operation of Council and these issues may contribute to the at-times patchy attendance of meetings. Therefore I have drawn up the attached proposed Standing Orders for Council, which for the most part attempts to encapsulate current practice and convention in writing. I have also included an update to the Standing Orders for Council's subcommittees (CSPB, ERB and CWB) as these were last passed by Council in 2014 and therefore due for renewal.

My intention is to have a completed draft of the document ready to be presented to (and hopefully passed by) Council for the first meeting of the coming academic term. To that end, I am bringing the current draft to this meeting for discussion in order to get feedback before distributing more widely.

Future Work

- Complete first draft including glossary (taking into account feedback from this meeting) for initial distribution to Council membership early in the first term
- Write a condensed and simplified 'guide' to the rules in the SOs to avoid potential issues with first-time attendees being overwhelmed by their length
- Table the document for consideration at the first Council meeting and, if passed, implement them. If not passed, consult with Council members, redraft and re-present.

Potential Points for Discussion

- SO2.2c (Interpretation of the SOs) – if the Board of Trustees decides that the Council Chair has erred and applied incorrect procedure during a meeting, should that decision *automatically* invalidate any votes taken by Council using incorrect procedure?
 - The Board will of course in any case retain the right to invalidate Council policy under clause 73 of the Constitution if it so chooses
 - Invalidation pending a re-vote with correct procedure would probably be appropriate if, for example, the incorrect procedure was applied deliberately in order to affect the outcome of a vote (the 'malicious Chair' situation)
 - It may, however, be heavy-handed to invalidate decisions taken following inadvertent errors on the part of the Chair
 - My personal feeling is that democratic votes of Council should not be overridden when it can be avoided, and that having to re-vote on items already decided

because of procedural rules most people would be hard-pressed to care less about would not be well-received by Council members or the wider student body, so would argue that invalidation should have to be deliberate and specific, but am open to considering alternate opinions.

- SO17.2 (Disorderly Conduct) – is it acceptable under the Bye-Laws to empower the Council Chair to obligate full members of the Union to leave a meeting they are entitled to attend?
 - I'm not aware of any instances of especially disorderly conduct at Council in my time, but provisions such as this could be useful in future
 - The Governance Review may give the opportunity for putting this on firmer footing
- SO24.4-5 (Seats shared between multiple members) – is it appropriate under the restriction on having multiple seats at Council to allow a Member holding a seat which can be taken up by multiple people to sit instead as an Ordinary Member?
 - I would imagine it's fine but it depends on how you interpret the phrase 'hold a seat'.
- Appendix B (Subcommittee SOs) – are the Standing Orders for the 4 Subcommittees acceptable and do they reflect current practice?
 - These are pretty much copied word for word from the previous versions (see attached minutes from the second meeting of Council in 2014-15) and adjusted to fit in with the subcommittee structure laid out in SO19.
 - I have never attended a meeting of any of these subcommittees, so would appreciate feedback on whether they function in the same manner as they did when the previous versions were drafted.
 - I have included the Executive Committee for completeness' sake; it might be helpful for people first looking into the Union's structures to have it written down in active Policy that the Committee is defunct.
- General feedback on the document:
 - Anything not in accordance with the Constitution and/or Bye-Laws?
 - Anything which should be included but has been missed?
 - Suggestions for improvements