

Goldsmiths SU Student Assembly 29th September 2016
6:00 pm, Ian Gulland Lecture Theatre

All students must bring their student ID in order to enter the meeting

1. Welcome and Introduction

1.1 Introducing the new officers present and the winners in the election

2. Apologies

3. Approval of the minutes from the last meeting.

4. Officer report

4.1 Presentation of priorities

4.2 Officer reports

5. Motions

4.1 Motion to support an MA Social Work Fee Strike

4.2 Schools Against Borders

4.3 Motion to financially support Valentina A. Lopez from Academics for Peace Goldsmiths

4.4 Motion regarding lack of heat during winter in halls (**Motion tabled till next assembly**)

4.5 Motion to oppose all fee increases past £9000 mark (Emergency Motion)

6. Any Other Business

4.1 Motion to support an MA Social Work Fee Strike

Proposer: Daniel Dawson
Secunder; Joss Bromley

This Union Notes:

The Department for Social Work at Goldsmiths University has raised tuition fees by 86.5% to £7,660 per annum for domestic students since the last academic year.

£4052 is covered by the bursary which before last year would have been the full amount of Tuition Fees.

Tuition fees for Social Work used to be capped at the amount paid for by the bursary.

The University has said that the 'fees are subject to change and may fluctuate year to year'.

The Department for Social Work notes on the official website that "Goldsmiths is committed in its policy and practice to equal treatment of applicants and students irrespective of their race, culture, religion, gender, disability, health, age or sexual orientation. [They] particularly welcome applications from members of minority groups."

MA Social Work students are in lectures and seminars every day of the week, with contact time upwards of 30 hours. Because of this Social Work students are advised by their teaching staff that even working part-time is incompatible with the course. While expecting MA Social Work students not to work to support themselves, the university also expects them to have near perfect attendance, to work a 70 day and 100 day placement respectively over two years without pay while paying rent and bills and all other living costs through a bursary that amounts to less than £8,000 per annum.

There are 5 out of 23 colleagues on the MA1 Social Work course that have dependants. Additional support is offered to some of these students at a weekly contribution of £155.24 for 1 child, £266.15 for 2 or more children. This money can only be used to reimburse the student with a dependant/dependants for registered childcare expenses incurred within the course's duration. Given the nature of this payment, it could not be used to pay fees.

Last year, fees were capped at the amount paid by the bursary due to an administration error and subsequent protest by current MA2 Social Work students.

Goldsmiths has been labelled a 'Centre for Excellence for Social Work' and has been awarded funding upwards of £1.7 million by the Government in order to provide new approaches in teaching Social Work through the Teaching and Learning Partnership which aims to get more social workers into statutory settings by having workers from local authorities to teach us alongside academic staff. The figure of £1.7 million has been confirmed by Joan Fletcher, the Head of Social Work at Goldsmiths, during a departmental address, though it is important to note that official figures for funding this year are hard to find.

The Social Work bursary is itself in a precarious position and is likely to be stopped in the same way that the NHS Bursary for Nursing has been.

Social Work students are taught that Social Work fundamentally has to be based on principles of anti-oppression and anti-discriminatory practice.

It is a requirement that Social Work students have over one year's experience working in a social care environment. In order to attend the course many students have left secure employment and now rely on the bursary as their only source of income.

Students expected to find out whether they were eligible to receive the NHS Social Work Bursary, and also how much they were entitled to, by the end of May 2016. They were not notified until midway through August 2016 (less than a month before the September 2016 start date for Social Work students), by which point many had already made irreversible arrangements in order to attend the university. This included but is not limited to handing in notice for employment and ending tenancy agreements.

Students in receipt of the bursary are not eligible to receive the Post-Graduate Student Loan.

The majority of students on the MA1 Social Work course cohort have expressed very real concerns that they a) do not know how they can pay for tuition fees that are not already covered by the bursary provided and b) will not be able to support themselves or their dependants if they have to pay top up fees out of said bursary.

That in light of all of the above facts related to the MA Social Work course at Goldsmiths, the majority of students on the MA1 course have chosen to withhold any fees not paid for by the bursary. Those who have already paid or are international students agree that this is the right action to take and show and express their solidarity.

This Union Believes:

That education should be free and accessible to people from all backgrounds.

That raising tuition fees by 86.5% in one year both makes university education inaccessible to people from marginalised backgrounds and reneges on Goldsmiths' commitment to welcoming people from minority groups.

That many students on the MA Social Work course have been made precarious in their living arrangements, their finances and their ability to perform the tasks expected of them on their course. This has been exacerbated by the lack of support to contend with the raising of tuition fees above the levels provided by the bursary.

That the Department for Social Work is itself refusing to act upon its own mandate of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice by marginalising its students more through an unnecessary raising of tuition fees above the level provided by the bursary.

That it is disingenuous of the Department for Social Work to raise the fees so heavily in the same year that they receive substantial funding from Government for the Teaching and Learning Partnership.

That a fee strike (withholding fees that do not include the £4,052 paid for by the bursary) is the only effective method to a) protest the raising of tuition fees above the levels of the bursary provided and b) provide for themselves and those who are dependant upon them.

The Union resolves:

That the Fee Strike for Social Work students (or any other students who might choose to strike on any course at the university) should be supported by the Campaigns Officer.

To provide funds and access to printed materials for the duration of the proposed Fee Strike.

To advise Social Work students on any matter regarding negotiations, threats or offers with or from the university.

To provide advocates during negotiations if or when necessary.

To publicly display support and solidarity for Fee Strikers.

4.2 Schools Against Borders

Proposer: Tiia Meuronen

Seconder: Mollie Kneath (Education Officer)

The Union Notes

The Department of Education (DfE) has a policy, effective from September 2016, to collect country of birth and nationality information on 8 million children in England. While the DfE has not explicitly stated what this information is for, it has conducted inquiries into what it terms “Education Tourism”, ie migration to the United Kingdom for the express purpose of accessing free public education. This new surveillance is also being implemented in the context of PM Theresa May’s pledge to create a “hostile environment” for undocumented migrants.

This new immigration data will be collected through the Early Years Census and School Census and then permanently stored on the National Pupil Database. These censuses happen every year and every academic term respectively. The first of the 2016/17 academic year will take place on 6th October.

Parents are not obliged to provide this information, which means that parents and schools can legally work together to withhold this information from the DfE. Work to raise awareness of this right is currently being undertaken by, amongst others, campaign groups Schools Against Borders and London Campaign Against Police and State Violence and supported by professional educators’ publications such as Schools Weekly.

The Union Believes

The reasons for people’s decisions to migrate to the UK are complex. Terms such as “education tourism” “benefits tourism” “healthcare tourism” etc are inflammatory terms which serve to stigmatise migration. The infiltration of border controls into ever more spheres of daily life, from immigration raids on workplaces to coopting healthcare services and educational institutions, exacerbates this by victimising individuals and creating a climate of suspicion and mistrust.

It is not the responsibility educational workers to enforce border controls. Access to these education is a right regardless of immigration status. Weaponising children’s education as a means to deport families is unjust and unacceptable.

An injury to one is an injury to all: this latest move by the DfE is part of a wave of repressive legislation targeting young people and children in education, from Prevent to the clampdown on international students in HE.

The Union Resolves

To stand in solidarity with education workers and campaign groups working against this legislation, and work to raise awareness of parents’ right to withhold immigration status. The Union urges all parents, and its parent members in particular, to sabotage this effort by refusing to give the relevant information regardless of immigration status.

The Union Mandates

Officers and other elected representatives of the Union to sign public condemnations of the DfE's policy and declarations of support for groups campaigning against it wherever possible.

Officers to write to Vicky Foxcroft MP announcing the Union's opposition to the DfE's policy and urging her to do the same.

Where possible, officers to encourage other Students' Unions and the National Union of Students to adopt analogous positions and campaign to raise awareness locally.

Pass on information to and work with the Nursery so that parents are fully aware of the change in policy and the action that they can take against it.

4.3 Motion to financially support Valentina A. Lopez from Academics for Peace Goldsmiths

Proposer: Neda Genova
Seconder: Su-Ann Goh

The Union notes

This Union notes that Valentina Alvarez Lopez, a PhD student and member of the group Academics for Peace Goldsmiths will attend two trials against members of the Turkish group 'Academics for Peace' (BAK) on 27.09.2016 in Istanbul, Turkey. The role of foreign observers at these trials is to demonstrate solidarity with the persecuted people but also to make the Turkish administration aware of the international concern that their actions against dissident civilians have provoked.

Academics for Peace Goldsmiths has been formed last term as a project which seeks to provide practical support and offer solidarity to our persecuted colleagues. The attendance of the trial in Turkey is the second action, after the organisation of a solidarity conference in June, that we are undertaking. In May, the Student Assembly voted that Academics for Peace Goldsmiths becomes an official SU campaign.

The Union Believes

This Union believes that as member of a SU-backed campaign, it is necessary to provide support for Valentina who is for now single-handedly paying her flight to Istanbul and covering her stay there.

The Union resolves

This Union resolves to cover her flight costs (approx. 180,-) from its campaign budget.

Motion regarding Heating in halls

Proposer Ben Laumann

Seconder Jonathan Kebe

This Union notes...

that in the Goldsmiths Operated Halls Terms and Conditions 2013-14/ 2014-15 / 2015-16,2016-17 "Heating is turned off in May and resumed in October. Generally, heating is only provided from approx. 06.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 23.00.Heating is not provided on a 24 hour basis."

Debates within the Goldsmiths-organised facebook-housing-groups, in this case the Loring Hall group, were censored and deleted by a specific RA, who is employed by Goldsmiths Housing Services, to prevent students from raising their voices against the lack of heating.

This Union believes...

that Goldsmiths should remain the greenest London University. However, we disagree on Goldsmiths Housing Services using the green-argument on depriving students from heating during nighttime. Cold rooms, especially during winter, have significant impacts on students health and their studies.

The Goldsmiths-"Cut the rent campaign" has very clearly shown the outrage about the incapability of Goldsmiths Housing Services to provide students with affordable and acceptable housing for their students. Censorship within the Goldsmiths-led housing-groups, by specific RA's have clearly shown, how distanced the Housing services are from students needs and their interest in shutting student's opinions down, depicting the lack of heat and the general state of the halls.

This Union resolves...

According to Legal Advice Centre of Queen Mary's,

"There are certain instances when a term is not binding because it is considered to be unfair under the Consumer Rights Act 2015 ('CRA 2015'). The CRA 2015 stipulates that a term is unfair when it causes a significant imbalance in the parties' rights and obligations to the detriment of the consumer."

A vote against the heating clause, is therefore likely to be deemed unfair, if the student assembly is voting against it.

The clause should be removed immediately. Current and past residents should be compensated for this unfair contract-clause.

Student's opinions should never be censored in the relevant facebook groups.

4.5 Motion to oppose all fee increases past £9000 mark (Emergency Motion)

Proposer: Danny Nasr (president)

Seconder: Mollie Kneath (education officer)

Union Notes

1. In 2010, tuition fees were tripled under the Conservative/Liberal Democrats coalition.
2. Over 50,000 students marched to show their discontent with this increase.
3. In 2016 the Conservative government replaced maintenance grants with maintenance loans.
4. Also in 2016, the Conservative government announced cuts to Disabled Students' Allowance, meaning students would not receive individual support.
5. Also in 2016, the Conservative government introduced the Higher Education Bill and Teaching Excellence Framework, which is enabled by it.
6. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is based on a series of metrics including the National Student Survey (NSS) and Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE). Based on universities' success in the TEF, they are allowed to increase their tuition fees.
7. Achieving a good score in the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 2015 allows universities to increase their fees past £9000.
8. Goldsmiths achieved a rating of 'excellence' in QAA in 2015.
9. In 2015, Goldsmiths' Students' Union passed policy to fight the white paper as a whole, including an NSS boycott.
10. In 2014, Goldsmiths' Students' Union passed policy to fight for free education.
11. NUS and UCU have called a national demo on #Nov19 called United for Education, in part to oppose these reforms.

Union Believes

1. Tuition fee increases will hit students from low-income and non-traditional backgrounds the most. This includes part-time students, students with caring responsibilities, mature students, and disabled students most notably.
2. Any rise in tuition fees is synonymous with the marketisation of the higher education sector.
3. Goldsmiths Students' Union has a proud history of standing up against detrimental reforms to our education systems.
4. Tuition fees should not exist, let alone be raised above £9000 a year for home students.
5. This is going to have a detrimental effect upon the fees of international students, whose fees are already uncapped and average £18-20,000 a year.
6. The metrics that feed into the TEF are flawed and aim to link employability with teaching quality, without considering the personal and external factors that come into play when applying for jobs.
7. The TEF aims to create a culture in which students will associate quality with price, thus suggesting that universities with cheaper fees are not of a good enough standard.

Union Resolves

1. To oppose any fee increases.
2. To lobby the university in an institutional capacity to not raise their fees.
3. To mobilise and organise our students on campus using a variety of tactics to pressure the university not to increase fees.

4. To mandate the officers of the union to organise and attend, alongside students, the #Nov19 demo.
5. To continue to participate in national action opposing the Higher Education bill, the TEF and the general trend of marketisation of the sector.