

Publicity for and access to Union Court

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Union Court history

1. The Union Court has been running for nearly three years as an important but rarely seen part of the Union: dealing most often with election and disciplinary appeals, but also a number of questions revolving around interpretations when some dispute has arisen.
2. Since its foundation it has dealt with (by way of example): whether a sabbatical officer has certain staff rights, who has certain types of disciplinary authority, financial authorisation powers, media censorship powers, whether insufficient publicity can make an election invalid, and so on.
3. Any Union member is entitled personally to request the Union Court to look into something, and needs no permission to do so. However, the overwhelming majority of references have come via the ICU President, and many of the others from Deputy Presidents or the ICU Executive Committee. This may give a misleading impression that requests are filtered by the top level of the Union, which they are not.
4. Informal surveys of student opinion (at least those students heavily involved in Union activities) suggest either poor awareness or major misconceptions about the Union Court's role. Obviously the Union Court was never going to be the busiest or highest profile part of Union (with occasional exceptions) but if those who need its services don't know about it then the system fails before it has even had a chance to start working.
5. The Union Court also deals with media (including Felix) disputes: the original idea being that a body independent of the Union officers would hear any complaint about them – previously the ICU Executive Committee dealt with the dispute, despite often having conflicts of interest.

Publicity

6. The Union Court's student members would like to improve publicity and understanding of what it does and how it can help students, committees and elected post-holders.
7. Therefore it is hoped that officers' and committees' training sessions and packs can include guidance (and the more important ones have a Court member speak), that the Court website is updated in a more user-friendly form, and other forms of reasonable publicity are used.

Union Advocate post

8. At its most recent meeting, the Trustee Board endorsed the concept of better publicity and a 'Union Advocate' post to improve awareness and ensure that relevant issues were referred to the Union Court when necessary.
9. It would be a post jointly created by the Council and Court as Union policy: the person could not sit on the ICU Executive Committee or be a Union Officer, but could hold any other post at the same time. The reason for the post being jointly created by the Council and Court is that the Court has expected to be completely responsible for its own administration, so it should approve it (and has already in principle) – but so should the Council as the senior democratic body in the Union.
10. The student would help act as a conduit for other students and officers for the Union Court, and be able to refer a matter he or she thought necessary. Union members could still refer something to the Union Court themselves if they wished.

ICU Resolves

Union Advocate Policy

1. The post of Union Advocate is established.
2. The Union Advocate may not simultaneously be a Union Officer or member of the ICU Executive Committee. The Union Advocate may simultaneously hold any other Union post.
3. The Union Advocate shall be elected by the ICU Council from the Full Membership.
4. The Union Advocate's job description is:
 - i. Represent the interests of the Full Union Members to the Union Court,
 - ii. Act with independence and impartiality,
 - iii. Refer any Union rule or rules to the Union Court where the rule may be unclear and there is a reasonable prospect of it causing practical difficulties in the future,
 - iv. Refer any matter which may be unconstitutional and there is an interest in the issue being referred to the Union Court,
 - v. Assist members of the Union in clarifying relevant Union Court decisions where necessary,
 - vi. Assist the Court under its standing orders in dealing with individual cases by bringing to its attention any relevant Union rules, previously decided cases and views of Union Officers, and
 - vii. Carry out such duties and responsibilities as may, from time to time, be laid down by the Union Court or the Council.
5. This policy does not restrict the right of any member of the Union to petition the Union Court directly as before.
6. This policy comes into force once it is also approved by the Union Court.