

## Council Advocacy Procedure

Paper by Alex Savell, Seconded by Tom Wheeler

### The Union Notes

According to the union website<sup>1</sup>, “Council is the paramount policy-making, scrutiny and accountability body of the Union and in effect the democratic voice of the student body”. More formally, if you look at the constitution<sup>2</sup> it states that:

“100 The Union Council shall have the authority to:

- 100.1 represent the voice of the Students;
- 100.2 subject to Clause 73, set the Policy of the Union and refer Policy to Referenda of the Members (in accordance with the Bye-Laws);
- 100.3 make, repeal and amend the Bye-Laws jointly with the Trustees and Imperial College London Council in accordance with Clause 11;
- [...]
- 100.7 form sub-committees and working groups as it sees fit from time to time”

As such, issues that are important to students should be debated to by council to the best of its ability (100.1) in order to set policy (100.2) and the Bye-Laws (100.3). Council also has the right to form smaller groups to deal with particular issues or make recommendations to council (100.7).

During this year there have been several issues at council that have inspired significant amounts of debate as evidenced by the council minutes<sup>3</sup>; for example the “Union’s Response to the Immigration Bill”<sup>4,5</sup>. While such debate is a part of Council’s mandate, there are options and debate possible with regards to how debates are structured and dealt with in order to best represent students and keep council as efficient a policy forum as possible.

### The Union Believes

- Issues brought to Council often inspire a significant amount of debate
- Not every member of council always has a strong opinion or specific interest in every issue
- Such issues deserve a thorough airing and full debate
- However, in council meetings these debates can often go in circles and risk leaving some members feeling disinterested in both the issue at hand and potentially any other matters subsequently raised in the meeting
- In some cases a shorter more focussed Council meeting may lead to better decisions, for this to occur there are situations where it would be more effective to curtail debate on one issue in order to allow more time for others
- In this situation some avenue for giving the issue sufficient time for full debate should be found

1 – [https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union\\_Council](https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union_Council)

2 – <https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/sites/default/files/Constitution%20Nov%202012.pdf>

3 – [https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union\\_Council](https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union_Council)

4 – [https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union\\_Council/file/2214](https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union_Council/file/2214)

5 – [https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union\\_Council/file/2223](https://www.imperialcollegeunion.org/your-union/how-were-run/committees/13-14/Union_Council/file/2223)

- There are other situations where a similar postponement of debate might be beneficial; for instance where to robustly defend a position more time for research or preparation would be beneficial or where other opinions could be sought
- In such situations it is not always a good solution to postpone debate to the following council; similar concerns will often still apply at the following meeting
- Having a formal mechanism for a forum to debate issues outside of the normal council meeting framework could help solve some of these issues and may lead to a simple consistent solution to how to deal with these issues
- Such a debate should be, as far as possible, a fair and balanced representation of the arguments, be open to all those that are interested and report back to council with both a published set of minutes (reflecting the issues debated) and specific recommendations where appropriate.

### **The Union Resolves**

- 1) To institute the 'Advocacy Procedure' as outlined in **Appendix1** as an option for council on matters they feel deserve further debate
- 2) One of the two possibilities below:
  - a. To action Alex Savell to draft the 'Advocacy Procedure Guidelines' as flexible guidelines for the format of debates under the procedure in conjunction with a working group of any interested individuals. This should be presented to council for approval (by email vote) as an appendix to the policy (see **Appendix2**)
  - b. As for 2) a. but with the option of choosing another individual to lead drafting the guidelines

## **Appendix1 – Council Advocacy Procedure Policy**

The Council Advocacy Procedure Policy, hereafter referred to as the Policy, is a formalised option for Union Council to refer certain issues to a separate forum for debate which will then feedback its discussions and recommendations on the issue to council. The Policy is intended primarily for issues for which it becomes evident a significant number of people have strong feelings about and where an extended debate in Union Council is not seen as the most productive forum and use of time for the discussion. The policy has been structured such that there is flexibility within it to handle different issues in different and appropriate ways and comes with a set of more specific guidelines that should be able to handle most issues in a fair and balanced fashion.

### **1) Terms:**

- 1.1 *Council Advocacy Procedure* (also *Advocacy Procedure*, *Advocacy*, or *CAP*)
- 1.2 *Advocacy Chair* (also *Chair* or *AC*)
- 1.3 *Advocates*
- 1.4 *Advocacy Debate* (also *Debate* or *AD*)
- 1.5 *Advocacy Procedure Guidelines* (also *Guidelines* or *APGs*)
- 1.6 *Union Council* (also *Council*)
- 1.7 *Union Council Chair* (also *Council Chair*)
  - 1.7.1 Note '*Chair*' on its own will always refer to the *Advocacy Chair* here

### **2) General Principals:**

- 2.1 Any member of council can propose a motion to move a particular debate to *CAP*
  - 2.1.1 This motion may optionally contain stipulations about how the *Advocacy Procedure* should be conducted including but not limited to: *Timeline*, *Advocates*, *Debate* format, *Advocacy Chair*
- 2.2 In general, the *Advocacy* will follow the '*Advocacy Procedure Guidelines*' where appropriate, except where designated by Council
  - 2.2.1 The *APGs* will be included as an appendix to the Policy
  - 2.2.2 If in the opinion of the *Advocacy Chair* the *Guidelines* are inappropriate for the circumstances they will seek to conduct the *Debate* in as fair, balanced and open a manner as possible

### **3) Roles:**

- 3.1 *Advocacy Chair:*
  - 3.1.1 One person (or in circumstances where no acceptably impartial candidate can be found a small committee) shall be chosen by council as the *AC*
  - 3.1.2 The *AC* shall organise and chair the *Advocacy Debate*
  - 3.1.3 The *AC* shall be responsible for informing the advocates how the *Debate* will be conducted with reference to any deviations from the *APGs*
  - 3.1.4 The *AC* shall be responsible for feeding back the results of the *Advocacy* to council
  - 3.1.5 The *AC* should remain impartial and seek to ensure fairness and balance to the best of their ability
  - 3.1.6 The *AC* will pick the *Advocates* if they are not nominated by *Council*

3.1.7 If no *Advocacy Chair* is named in the motion then *Council* shall choose the *Chair* separately or delegate the choice to the *Council Chair*

3.1.8 The *AC* will be responsible for the veracity of the minutes (see 4.3.1)

3.2 *Advocates:*

3.2.1 Except in exceptional circumstances, *Advocates* should be chosen to represent the main positions in the *Debate*

3.2.2 *Advocates* may be named as part of the *AP* motion, chosen by *Council* or picked by the *AC*

3.2.3 The *Advocates* exact role may vary based on the circumstances of the *Debate*

3.2.4 The *Advocates* will typically be expected to organise representing their assigned position (either themselves, by delegation or as part of a team) to the best of their ability

3.2.5 The *Advocates* are encouraged to be engaging, creative and persuasive within the limits of the *Debate* as outlined down by the *AC*

**4) Advocacy Debate:**

4.1 A meeting, the *Advocacy Debate*, will be held to discuss the issue

4.2 The *AD* should be advertised and open to all interested parties from the membership of the union

4.3 The *Debate* should be minuted such that a record of the issues discussed can be kept and presented to *Council*

4.3.1 Since it will be a one off meeting the *AC* shall be ultimately responsible for verifying the accuracy of the minutes

4.4 After the debate, all full members of the union present at the meeting (with the exception of the *AC*) may vote on the issue in order to form recommendations to council

4.5 In exceptional circumstances an *AD* meeting may not be the best method for discourse on a particular issue and in this rare case alternative methods may be sought

4.6 In general, the meeting should take place at least 5 college days after the instigating council meeting and 5 college days before the subsequent meeting where the results will be presented

4.6.1 This may be amended where it is not possible to achieve or where there is other just cause for doing so

**5) Advocacy Procedure Result:**

5.1 When the minutes are presented to council the issue itself and the recommendations of the advocacy meeting should be recapped

5.1.1 This will generally be by the *AC*

5.2 A vote should be taken on whether to accept the recommendations

5.2.1 Council may also chose to amend or change the recommendations as well as simply accept or reject them

5.2.2 Further discussion of the issue should not usually take place unless there is a reason such discussion was not included in the *AD*

## **Appendix2 – Notes on the Advocacy Policy Guidelines**

This paper has been presented without a central element: the guidelines for how to organise a debate and what format it should take. There are several reasons for this, firstly, I felt it was better to present the concept of instituting a separate forum for debating issues and then worry about the specifics of how it would work. In addition presenting a full method for how it would be conducted would risk rejecting the proposal due to a practical flaw rather than the concept being a bad one.

I also feel strongly that more than one person should help to shape how we conduct debates over issues and so I would hope to form a small working group to discuss the standard format for such a debate and have this feed into a draft of the guidelines.

I think it is also important that these remain guidelines; as you will see the policy itself only defines that a chair should be put in charge of running the debate and that advocates should take responsibility for each side of the debate. After this the chair has the option to follow the guidelines or deviate from them as they choose where this seems most appropriate for that issue. Retaining a good balance between plenty of guidance and the flexibility to approach any issue in a manner tailored to fit it is also important.

The guidelines when drafted should bear in mind several central concepts:

- They should be specific, but cover most potential issues with little or no alteration needed
- They should work with the initial format proposed of a Chair and Advocates for each position
- They should be balanced and fair
- They should be an open format that presents the main arguments and allows input and opinions to be raised by as many interested persons as possible