

Union Council
12 January 2016

Council Report – Christopher Kaye, Deputy President (Finance & Services)

Happy New Year

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London Living Wage - Working Group report

I've held both sessions of the Working Group on the London Living Wage. I would like to thank those that participated, as well as the Managing Director and Finance Manager who provided us the information we requested.

Here is a summary of the thoughts of the group.

A majority of the group believed there was not sufficient need to introduce LLW as the LLW is based on a calculation not applicable to a typical student, as it takes into account outlays such as on dependents and Council Tax.

The group recognised that the flexibility in shifts offered by the Union is of material benefit to students who choose to work for the Union, and is much greater than would be expected to be given to seasonal staff in the private sector.

There were also concerns raised about the financial impact that increase in wages and therefore bar and retail prices would cause. It was recognised that this would be highly likely to reduce the number of employment opportunities available for students at the Union. The extra ~£120,000 cost, if the money could be found by making the necessary cuts, could perhaps be better used on activities or reduced prices that benefit all students, and not just those employed on a casual basis at the Union.

However there was dissenting opinion as well. Some of the group feel that in principle it is right we pay the LLW regardless. The group was aware of potential for reputational damage as well by not paying the LLW, given that some other London student unions have committed to doing.

Some of the group also considered that the ~£120,000 cost was calculated based on retaining the wage differential between different levels. The cost could potentially be reduced if the bands were restructured.

Some of the group also made the point that while the LLW is based on calculations that don't directly relate to students, the same could also be said of any group of society.

The group was unanimous that, regardless of the level of pay for student staff, the Union must continue to push for financial support for all students in financial need through e.g. the Student Support Fund.

Budgeting training

I have delivered or co-delivered 6 sessions of budgeting training to club committee members. I will be doing more in January. I am looking forward to this process being completed.

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Hidden course costs

I had a meeting with College Registry to discuss hidden course costs. These include things that are not provided by the College but that are necessary to complete your degree. Examples are things like rock hammers, paying for field trips, waterproof field notebooks and the like.

I was very clear that I believed the College needs to be more upfront and transparent about this at the point of a student's application to the College. I also stated that I believed the end-game should be for all these necessary costs to be included as part and parcel of the fees they pay for their degree.

I stated that I believe that there also shouldn't be a 'closed shop' on buying such equipment and that students should be free to buy the equipment from any provider they wish.

Registry will keep me in the loop. I've asked Registry to engage with Dep Reps and Year Reps for more information on 'hidden costs' by department and year group.

Good Wishes

I wish you all a peaceful and prosperous 2016, the year of Her Majesty's 90th birthday.