

Union Council Minutes

Meeting Information

Date:	Monday 18th February 2025
Time:	14:00-16:00
Location:	Hybrid; MS Teams & SU 1st Floor Activities Hall

Attendance Registry

Role	Present/Apologies/ No Show	Name
Executive Team		
SU Chairperson	N/A	Vacant
SU President	Present	Juan Carlos Garcia Belza [JCGB]
Vice-President Education	Present	Afia Amanoullah [AA]
Vice-President Student Activities	Present	Sayeed Farooq [SF]
Vice-President Welfare	Present	Karina Jutla [KJ]
Vice President Communities	Present	Taher Gadiwala [TG]
Women's Officer	Present	Anisha Chakraborty [AC]
International Students' Officer	Present	Pratik Singh [PS]
Disabled Students' Officer	Present	Phoebe Allen [PA]
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Officer	Apologies	Razwan Siddique [RS]
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer + Officer	N/A	Vacant
Postgraduate Officer	No Show	Rahul Bharadwaj [RB]
Mature Students' Officer	Present	Nibras Abou Al Shamat [NAAS]
Commuter Students' Officer	Present	Ahmed Kousar [AK]

Meeting Minutes

Agenda Item	Description	Minutes
1.	Welcome	<p>President (JCGB) chaired the meeting as Vice chair.</p> <p>JCGB provided a concise overview of the purpose of the Council, emphasizing its key roles and responsibilities. The primary functions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding the Executive Committee accountable for their actions and decisions. • Submitting and voting on motions aimed at bringing about meaningful changes within the Students' Union (SU) and the University. <p>JCGB also highlighted the importance of maintaining annual quoracy, which is set at 50 members. He confirmed that the current meeting meets this requirement and is therefore quorate, enabling the Council to proceed with its agenda effectively.</p>
2	Approval of any appointments delegated to Union Council	
3.	Apologies for Absence	
3.1		Above in Attendance Registry. President (JCGB) acknowledged that 1 apology had been received.
4.	Previous Minutes	
4.1	4.1 – UC2023.11	<p>President (JCGB) noted minutes for the previous meeting are available on the website and Council will need to approve them.</p> <p>The minutes were approved by council.</p>
5.	Matters Arising from previous meeting	
		<p>Updates from motions passed at the last Union Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASET Motion / Byelaws Update – Update by VPW (KJ): The byelaws have been created and now await Council approval. • Game Changer – SF provided an update in his main officer update. • Green Motion – JCGB noted that green accommodation continue as usual. • Creative Space Motion – JCGB shared that discussions are ongoing. The SU has enquired

		<p>about the possibility of having a space in the new building on Woodcock Street.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for Activities – A block grant request will be submitted for the next academic year, considering the need for additional funding. Security Motion – No formal update, but JCGB acknowledged recent improvements in campus security as a temporary solution following recent incidents.
6.	Executive Committee Plan Updates	<p>President (JCGB) invited the Full-Time and Voluntary officers to give their updates.</p> <p>AA (VPE):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Let's Chat</i> survey – report in development to be sent to the University and published. University Senate in December – successful event involving student reps and university executives; another one is planned. Academic Awards – nominations are currently open. Rep Awards (bronze, silver, gold) – coming soon. Student Rep Hub – continues to run with regular workshops and meetings. <p>KJ (VPW):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free Breakfast (every Wednesday) and Wellbeing Package (biweekly) – ongoing. Period Poverty – “Never Overreacting” campaign continues. Neurodiversity Café – launched as a new initiative. Wellbeing Survey – conducted in December. Managing volunteer groups including ASET, Welfare Committee, and Astonbury Committee. Various events as part of different campaign work (e.g. Lovebury). <p>SF (VP Sports):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Game Changer motion – focused on sports development. 280 student votes in support; initially low university interest, but recent discussions more positive. Outcome expected in next academic year Motion on funding for student activities, likely funded via block grant Upcoming event to celebrate sport – “Reshape Sports”.

- St. John Ambulance now present at sports club games.
- Support for both competitive and social sports to combat loneliness.
- Hidden Gems campaign and prizes for Clubs & Societies Fair.
- Working on AU Ball and Challenge Week.
- Collaborating with VPW on Astonbury.

TG (VPC):

- Citizens UK Assembly – discussions around what the West Midlands Authority can do for Aston students.
- Green Motion – still working to ensure the green continues to provide affordable housing options for students.
- 3rd Astonbury is confirmed.
- STAR Committee – collaboration for community housing initiatives.
- International Mother Language Day – small-scale event due to limited capacity.

JCGB (President):

- Focus on officer accountability.
- Developing SU Strategy 2030 – aligning with key themes such as student loneliness.
- Office for Students (OfS) visit – regulatory engagement.

PA (Disabled Students' Officer):

- Progress on manifesto points:
 - Radar key standardisation for disabled toilets
 - Centralised exam arrangement info
 - Improving access to support before students arrive at Aston
- Collaborating with KJ on a Disability Festival

AC (Women's Students' Officer):

- Focused on mental health and networking opportunities for women.

PS (International Students' Officer):

- Supporting the shuttle initiative for new international students.
- Working on improving Mental health support for international students
- Collaborating with TG on International Mother Language Day

NAAS (Mature Students' Officer):

- Developing a survey for mature students to identify areas for improvement

AK (Part-Time and Commuter Students' Officer):

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working on a survey targeting commuter and part-time students
7.	Reports from other bodies	
7.1		No Reports submitted
8.	Motions for debate from Executive Committee	
		No Motions submitted
9.	Motions for debate from other Student Members	
9.1	9.1 UC2024.11 <i>Motion – Rep Hub</i>	9.1 Motion – Rep Hub (UC2024.11) presented by AA Proposal to make the Student Rep Hub a formal SU policy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A biweekly platform for reps to connect, share information, and learn about SU and university initiatives. Empowers reps to campaign and engage. Positive feedback received. Majority agreed by show of hands in the room. No questions asked.
9.2	9.2 UC2024.11 <i>Motion – Wellbeing packages and Breakfast</i>	9.2 Motion – Wellbeing Packages and Breakfast (UC2024.11) Presented by KJ and Aisha Bibi Proposal to continue the current free breakfast and wellbeing package initiatives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 30 students attend breakfast weekly Over 100 applications for wellbeing packages Helps alleviate financial stress so students can focus on studies Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend breakfast time or offer more options? – Dependent on funding; hot food is not feasible currently. Eligibility criteria for wellbeing package? – Financial situations are assessed. In cases of oversubscription, eligibility is reviewed. Is breakfast for everyone? – Yes, it's grab-and-go and free for all. JCGB clarified that the initiatives are already happening. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Majority agreed by show of hands in the room.

9.3	9.3 UC2024.11 <i>Motion – Neurodiversity café</i>	9.3 Motion – Neurodiversity Café (UC2024.11) presented by KJ Proposal to make the Neurodiversity Café an official SU policy. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe, bimonthly space for neurodiverse students. • Positive reception. • Majority agreed by show of hands in the room. No questions asked
9.4	9.4 UC2024.11 <i>Motion – Enhancing Support</i>	9.4 Motion – Enhancing Support (UC2024.11): Presented by JCGB and KJ Proposal to improve accountability mechanisms at the university and SU. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a Student Solutions Centre-style service to hold the University accountable. • Examples: delayed placement support, unanswered emails, long call wait times. • No current formal feedback process at the university. • Proposal includes a feedback rating system. Discussion: KJ: Students deserve a higher standard; the Union is trying to empower their voice. Clare Gough (Chief Student Officer) attended to hear student concerns and highlighted the need for data to inform resource allocation. Student Feedback: Repeated poor communication from university teams (emails unanswered, long call queues). Request for a STAR system for academic feedback; response: initiative is more focused on student life, not academics. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority agreed by show of hands in the room.
KJ10.	Guest Speakers not related to the Motions debate	
		No Guest Speakers
11.	Other Business Approved by the Chair	
11.1	Shuttle Service	Presented by PS Proposal to reinstate the student shuttle service. This was available in the past and discussions are ongoing to bring it back. For Council's awareness.
11.2	Mental health support	Presented by PS

		Aligns with JCGB accountability motion for better services.
11.3	Duration of Policy	<p>Presented by KJ and AA</p> <p>Proposal to extend SU policy durations from one year to three years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intended to provide continuity and allow enough time to evaluate impact. <p>Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would this undermine future student officers? – No; policies are student-approved, not officer-specific. How will success be measured? – Through data collection and impact reports. Can students hold officers accountable if things don't work out? – Yes.
12.	Business that has arisen since the 7-day deadline for items and deemed to be an emergency by the Chair	
		<p>JCGB raised this matter for discussion at Union Council.</p> <p>Over the last four years, CEG has only paid for 1.5 years of the expected service fees, amounting to nearly £100,000.</p> <p>The key decision now is: if CEG continues to withhold payment, should their students still be allowed to access Union services?</p> <p>There have been positive discussions, with members generally supportive of JCGB's proposals.</p> <p>Student question:</p> <p>One student raised a concern that this could be unfair to CEG students — particularly those on foundation year programmes who later transition into full Aston degrees. In such cases, Aston benefits from the students in the long term. They also highlighted ongoing IT issues.</p> <p>Response:</p> <p>It was noted that alternative options are being explored, including the possibility of the university covering the costs.</p>

		<p>Additional concern:</p> <p>The student also pointed out recurring IT issues with the SU website over the years.</p> <p>Response from the Activities team:</p> <p>They explained that while IT issues have occurred, they have been different each time and are addressed as they arise.</p>

Next Meeting Information

Date:	6th May 2025
Time:	2-4pm
Location:	1st Floor Activity Hall and Microsoft teams