

Constitutional dispute leads to resignation of SU Women's Officers

By Heidi Blake
DEPUTY NEWS EDITOR

GRACE FLETCHER HALL resigned from the post of YUSU Women's Officer on Wednesday, in the midst of controversy over proposed changes to the SU constitution.

Her resignation automatically means the resignation of joint officers Bex Emery and Becky Tichband.

The ex-Women's Officer, who had put up posters around campus encouraging students to vote against the changes, resigned at the Union's Executive Committee Meeting on Wednesday after Micky Armstrong, the SU President, threatened to propose a vote of no confidence against her unless she called a halt to her campaign.

Fletcher Hall explained in an interview the day after her resignation that she opposes the constitution,

which removes all Equality Officers from the Union's Executive Committee, primarily on the grounds that it will reduce the representation of women and minority groups at the SU. She also expressed concerns about the fact that the changes allow for sabbatical officers to stand for a second term.

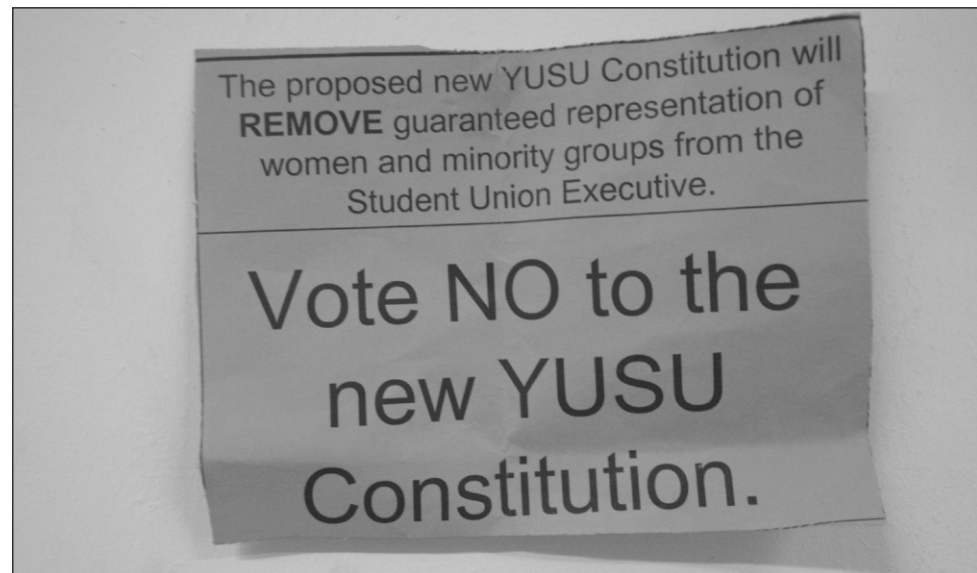
The ex-Women's Officer commented that, despite promises of "lots and lots of consultancy", the changes are being "rushed through", adding "they want it done in time for the SU elections". The revised constitution, which was released in week two, will be discussed at the Union General Meeting next Tuesday. Online voting will take place in week five.

Fletcher Hall told Nouse that the Women's Officers had attended meetings with the President and Services Officer to discuss their objections to the

changes last week, but reached no agreement. Following a discussion at Women's Committee, they informed Armstrong that they intended to campaign against the changes, to which he initially made no objection.

However, Fletcher-Hall claims the President later threatened a vote of no confidence against her (which he denies) unless she stopped the campaign, claiming that it is illegal and unconstitutional to protest publicly against an organisation of which one is a trustee. Despite saying at the ECM "I don't agree with Micky's interpretation of the law", Fletcher Hall chose to resign her position.

Armstrong said on Thursday that he was "disappointed" that the ex-Women's Officer had decided to resign, but that he understood their differences on the



The posters and leaflets were distributed around campus. Photo: Georgi Mabee

matter were fundamental. In response to the claim that the changes had being rushed through Executive Committee, he said "I thought two weeks was quite a long time". The President claimed that the changes will increase representation of minority groups, while commenting, "certain people are presenting it differently", adding "that's what makes me angry".

According to a recent SU press release, "the current Executive Committee will be expanded and converted into a Union Senate

[on which Equality Officers will have a place]. With increased participation, this body will make all moral and ethical decisions, and will set the direction of the Union. The Executive Committee is to be streamlined into a management body."

Fletcher Hall said on Thursday "Exec. will be about making managerial decisions and not representing welfare [but] if they are not going to be making decisions which represent the student body then what the hell are they there for?"

Responding to concern

over the provision for sabbatical officers to stand twice, Armstrong said "this isn't something I've done just to give myself a job [but] I won't rule anything out". He said that the changes would bring the SU into line with the Education Act, which states that sabbatical officers should not stand for longer than two terms.

A by-election will be held in week six to replace the resigning officers. Until then, Neil Barnes, the Education and Welfare Officer, will take on their workload.

University projects £3 million budget deficit

By Heidi Blake
DEPUTY NEWS EDITOR

A PROJECTED shortfall in the University's budget has led to concerns among students that an increased focus on commercial services will be detrimental to their welfare.

The University has foreseen a shortfall of £3 million in its budget by the end of the academic year. The overspend has occurred chiefly as a result of unexpectedly high energy bills, and is to be remedied by campus-wide cut-backs on the use of electricity and an increased focus

on income-generating activities such as conferences, printing and campus shops.

A complete review of the budget is underway, and is being overseen by Vice-Chancellor Felicity Riddy. According to David Garner, the University Press Officer, "every Department and every member of staff is involved in the drive to help the University to become more cost-efficient".

One member of University staff, who cannot be named, said of the cost-cutting drive "it's all very well, but you've still got the big bosses sitting there with

their big salaries and all the perks".

When asked about what he thought an increased focus by the University on commercial ventures might mean for students, Matthew Lacey of Alcuin College said "I wouldn't like the idea of University facilities being monopolised by conferences and I wouldn't want large amounts of student-received finances to be spent on them either".

Catherine Vondrak, of the same college, said "students won't matter anymore. We'll just pale away into insignificance. We could fall

into the lake and drown for all they care".

This comes at a time when ninety students have recently been relocated to Alcuin from Vanbrugh C Block, which is to be converted into offices. Speaking on Friday, Mickey Masefield, Vanbrugh Chair, said "it sometimes feels like they operate as a conference park rather than an actual university, and they wish students wouldn't get in the way for 30 weeks of the year".

Nat Thwaites-McGowan, the SU Services Officer said on Thursday "The University have set

themselves a target of reducing their budget deficit. Several methods are being considered, one of which is to increase commercial income. The alternative, one might suppose, would be to cut services in other areas. Given, then, that an increased concentration on generating income will save services in other areas, I don't think this should be seen as a negative decision".

David Garner claimed that the University is not "seeking to engage in significant new income-generating activities, but we want to make our existing commer-

cial activities [such as Costcutter and the Conference Park] more profitable". He was keen to emphasise that such activities exist to subsidise facilities and services for students and members of University staff.

The University asked that students conserve energy where possible. Thwaites-McGowan joined the call for greater campus energy consciousness on Thursday, saying "every student who takes the positive decision to turn off a light or a computer when it isn't needed is helping the situation."

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