

## **Stirling Students' Union Staff-Student Protocol**

### **Overview**

Stirling Students' Union is a political and professional organisation. It is the representative body of the students of Stirling University. It is a democratic organisation which is led by students as laid out in the governing documents.

The purpose of this protocol is to provide clarity over the relationship between the elected officers, members, the Trustee Board and the staff who are employed by Stirling Students' Union to provide professional advice, support and continuity. In order to achieve this, this protocol will be issued to all officers, Trustees and staff.

The aim of this protocol is to ensure that there is a positive and empowered relationship between the student members, officers and staff.

This protocol is intended to complement the Stirling Students' Union governing documents and procedures by providing guidance on raising issues and seeking solutions where these arise.

The nature of the staff/ student working relationship can be complex and this protocol is in place to provide broad principles to enable best working practice. There is an expectation that all members, officers, Trustees, and staff are always treated with respect and courtesy.

### **Definitions**

This protocol seeks to clarify the role of:

- **Stirling Students' Union Members**
  - These are the students who are represented by the Students' Union. Any student has the option of opting out of membership of Stirling Students' Union and will not be disadvantaged in doing so other than by losing the right to participate in democratic events such as elections.
  
- **Stirling Students' Union Officers**
  - These are elected by the members to provide political leadership and to represent the students of the University of Stirling throughout the structures of the Students' Union and the University. Sabbatical officers are employed by Stirling Students' Union and other student leaders (including elected and appointed roles, as well as Students' Union roles and within student groups) are Members as well.

- Stirling Students' Union Trustees
  - These are the sabbatical officers, student Trustees and external Trustees who have overall responsibility in law for ensuring that Stirling Students' Union delivers its aims for the benefit of the members.
  
- Stirling Students' Union Staff
  - These are individuals employed by the Students' Union and work under the direction of the Chief Executive Officer to ensure that the day to day running of Stirling Students' Union is informed and influenced by political and operational policy.
  
- Stirling Students' Union Student Staff
  - These are Stirling University students employed on an as and when basis by Students' Union.

In doing so the protocol draws on a distinction between political policy and operational policy:

- Political policy is led by officers; developed, debated and approved by the student members within the Students' Union's democratic structures
  
- Operational policy is led by staff and provides a framework, in accordance with the Strategic Plan, for carrying out the day to day running of the Students' Union.

The Trustees are legally responsible for ensuring that the political and operational policy of the Students' Union is consistent with the advancement of education of students at Stirling University for the public benefit.

### **Democratic Expectations**

Stirling Students' Union expects its staff to be understanding of and advocates for the democratic processes in general and may ask staff to help support events and activities, such as elections. There will be training and support available for any staff member asked to support student-led democracy, which should include a refresh on the contents of this Protocol.

It is entirely appropriate for staff to help students and elected Officers in their preparation for democratic events. In specific circumstances agreed with the Chief Executive, it may also be appropriate for staff to act in support of an agenda agreed by an elected Officer, for example in answering questions about policy in a public forum.

Stirling Students' Union wants students and elected Officers to lead our work. It would therefore be inappropriate for staff to assert, or appear to assert, their own agenda within democratic spaces. This specifically includes any biased support for any individual candidate in an election. Stirling Students' Union may consider any act of staff which undermines student-led democracy to be misconduct within the disciplinary procedures.

Staff have the right to expect that democratic procedures do not discuss their performance. Staff do not have a right to reply to any praise or criticism and it is therefore unfair to discuss their performance in an open meeting. If any student wishes to comment on Stirling Students' Union priorities or performance, they should do so by asking questions to the elected Officer with political responsibility for the area in question.

### **Expectations / Obligations of Elected Officers and Staff**

Stirling Students' Union expects there to be a close working relationship between officers and staff. Broadly, however, the work of staff is determined via the organisational staff structure which is in place and will be informed by the aims of the sabbatical officers via the Chief Executive and senior management team.

This does not exclude relatively minor requests for advice and support from officers to coordinators, especially where it might be impractical to first consult the relevant senior manager.

However, in general, officers should not give direction to any staff. In turn all staff will respond positively to reasonable requests from officers to ensure a harmonious working relationship.

Staff, including student staff whilst on duty, will not comment on the political policy of the Students' Union. In providing guidance for officers related to political policy, this will include advice on processes, balanced options, and similar policy which may be relevant but will not include personal views and will remain neutral.

Similarly, officers will be expected not to encourage Students' Union staff to become involved in political policy other than in the way described above. Staffing matters, including negative comments and criticism of staff members are to be treated as confidential and will not be discussed or communicated at committees, forums or in the media. In the same way staff will be expected to refrain from criticising the actions of any officer.

### **Raising issues and complaints**

Courtesy between officers and staff is expected at all times, however Stirling Students' Union acknowledges that despite the principles laid out in this protocol, issues can arise between officers and staff. Every effort will be made to resolve any such issues following an informal route. Where this is not possible or has failed to resolve the issue, the appropriate procedure should be followed. This could be one of the following:

- a. Schedule 6 Discipline Procedure
- b. Staff disciplinary procedures
- c. The Students' Union Complaints Process

The Chief Executive Officer, or another member of the Students' Union Senior Management, can provide advice on the appropriate process. Please contact them via emailing [theunion@stir.ac.uk](mailto:theunion@stir.ac.uk).