

## What is the issue you want to change?

On the 20th of February, the Guild announced a proposal from the Trustee Board to stop non-students from becoming external members, stopping them from accessing Guild services - student groups being the main and by far most-valued one. This has quickly become one of the most - if not the most - commented-on and lowly-rated bit of Guild news on the website. There are many clear reasons why this is an issue, our main three I will go through now:

### 1. This Harms Individuals

External members are valued, experienced and welcome parts of our Guild community and our smaller society communities. They have lots to contribute, whether just as friends or as alumni with experience and connections, or as carers for disabled students. The transition out of university isn't an easy one and cutting people away from the societies they love and enjoy makes it all the harder, especially on people's mental health.

### 2. This Harms Societies

Other than the obvious financial cost to the Guild banning external memberships, there is a significant social impact to trying to take these people out of our communities. External members enrich the experience of joining a society because they can share expertise and generational knowledge that would otherwise be lost. In a similar way, maintaining a link to local young professionals is incredibly useful for academic societies and can lead to partnerships, sponsorships and interesting speakers for those societies.

### 3. It's Not Effective

Banning external memberships by some central diktat does not stop the fact that non-students will continue to come to society events and it is naïve to think otherwise. Because some people will always behave badly, there is a chance, just like there is with students, that one such non-student will cause a serious incident which has to be dealt with. Where currently and previously, the Guild is there to support and advise the society and its committee, under this proposal they would not be able to get this help from the Guild as such external members are not supposed to be there. This leaves committee members in the situation of having to call the police as the only back-up. The Guild can at the moment take formal action against them and refer people to the police if the incident is serious enough.

Just to cap all of this off, the current proposal has seen no student input, no democratic process and no consultation with those affected. There has been ample time for this to have been suggested, student feedback taken on board and a sensible solution created. Instead, the Guild has ordered external members gone having spent months ignoring and refusing to give feedback to any students and have rejected recent calls for democratic input.

A few of the comments on the original press release were unhelpful and rude but most were sharing genuine heartfelt feedback and anguish. One seems pertinent at this moment: "do better.".

**What solutions or actions do you have?**

We would like the Guild to maintain a similar system for external memberships: any member of uni staff, a recent alumnus, carer for a disabled student or student on a leave of absence is assumed to be allowed to become an external member of the Guild and, more importantly societies. Anyone not in any of those categories could apply but it would need the approval of one of the full-time officer team. This process is free (as democratically decided by students last year) but the external members pay an amount decided by the society they wish to join as a membership fee. This system is to be managed by Guild core staff with officers there only to make judgements on instances where staff are unsure whether someone qualifies or should be allowed to join.

**How will you know your idea is a success?**

Covered above. We will know it works when there are once more happy external members at the Guild.