

Dear Chairman,

You speak about issues of trust in your letter to Octavian Fitzherbert, and we the current union as well as previous unions must make you aware of the level of distrust and the lack of confidence we have in the management of NCAD.

We in the Students Union in principle respect and understand the confidentiality of the board. We fully understand the error of our actions at our most recent accounts meeting with Damian Downes and Dervil O'Brien (25/02/15). However I must admit that times were desperate. The students' union had not received payment in over two months and thus we the union officers were paying for the day to running costs of the students union, in the hope that our payment requests and salary would be received in the near future.

We were also told that the union had gone eighteen thousand euro over budget which is blatantly false, as well as being told last week for the first time that our sports and leisure budget was twenty seven thousand euro. It was previously agreed to be 40,000 (this is the figure which is published on the HEA website for NCAD SU sport and leisure). Following this meeting, the then discussed figure of 27,000 euro (not agreed) became 22,500 euro in a matter of hours when we received an email concerning our budgets from Dervil O'Brien. This sort of falsehood in accounting is absolutely unacceptable and near impossible to work with.

I must also add that this is not the first time that delayed payments to the union has been allowed to happen in our term.

In mid November 2014 our payments from accounts were three months overdue, resulting again in a period where the union officers were paying for the running of the union. These cases of negligent accounting has caused us in the union untold stress, which the college management is entirely accountable for.

The students' union subvention fund which is to be received every month, previously has been four thousand eight hundred euro, was said to be cut by 10% is now being said to be a 12.5% cut. I might add that none of this, subvention or sports and leisure funding has ever been discussed fully, agreed, or given to us in any set written format. This information only travels to us by word of mouth, and can be changed at any moment Rendering it near impossible to work with accounts.

In our meeting on the 25th February, Damian also suggested that the union may have to consider the possibility of only taking on one union officer next year instead of the usual two. Admittedly he withdrew his remark yet we are still outraged at his suggestion of the students having one less representative, a blatant belittling of our role here in NCAD.

We are fully aware of the unprecedented trying and complex financial situation the college is and has been facing in recent years, and both past and present Student Unions have been incredibly patient and fully trusting of the college management in their efforts to deal with these issues, unfortunately the patience of the students has gone unrewarded and our trust in college officials has been broken.

Let us make it clear that our soul motivation is to ensure the best possible education for the students of the college and the delivery of the services they have been promised.

At the beginning of the 2013/2014 academic year (on the 24/10/14) the previous union were approached by the students of the glass announcing that they had no tutor, no technician and no furnace in their department. These complications were never discussed with the union prior to the students coming to the union officers.

Given that this was an incident which occurred outside of the colleges control, the students were willing to be patient and trust that this issue would be dealt with efficiently and in the best possible way. It is fair to say that the students of the college would not have that patience nor trust in the management of the college in matters such as this again.

The union immediately organised a meeting with Declan McGonagle who assured them that the problem would be rectified by Christmas 2013. When the minutes of this meeting were brought to the attention of the glass students they stated that they had heard a different story from Derek McGarry and Alex Milton.

What Derek and Alex had said was that the problem would be rectified in January, clearly a mis-communication but of course it did add to the anxiety of the students within the glass department.

In January Alex Milton had made the plan that the furnace then would be changed from gas to electricity making the system safer and cheaper to run, this change would happen in the summer of 2014. This plan was then reassured in the director's report to an board of the 7th of March 2014.

#### *" Glass at NCAD*

*Unfortunately Caroline Madden (Lecturer in Glass) is not yet able to return to work. We have now researched, with external expert advice, equipment needs for the Glass area and have decided to proceed with the creation of a new glass melting furnace and recuperation on site. This work can only be done during the summer period, so as not to disturb students during the teaching year up to the final exhibitions. 4<sup>th</sup> Year students (3) who have particular difficulties this year, have been supported by external staffing and practitioners being brought in as well as the use of glass blowing facilities in the Leitrim Sculpture Centre. It is acknowledged, however, that their learning has been disrupted and discussions are underway, including the External Examiner, to consider how assessment at the end of the*

*year will take account of this and some degree of mitigation will be necessary, to be finalised. The investment, as previously discussed and agreed, can only be made at c. €25k in the context of new thinking and a new configuration for Glass at NCAD, in the context of a wider review process.”*

This assured the glass students that the problem was being dealt with, although, the then fourth years were incredibly upset, justifiably.

This plan, as we all now know was abandoned five days before the end of the previous union end of term, and just at the beginning of our term on the 25th of June 2014. The decision abandon the plan was agreed by the board on the 20th of June 2014. The previous union officers stated that the manner in which the issue had been handled disingenuously and coupled with the final announcement made at a time that could be described as cynical and certainly out of the blue.

We then stepped in as the students' union and continued the discussion about the glass furnace throughout the summer of 2014 when we discovered that the glass furnace was now out of the question and would not be re installed. Instead a new course was written up, which did not include glass blowing in what I can only assume was understood as some sort of 'solution', rather than an acceptance that NCAD can no longer provide a fully comprehensive glass course.

At the beginning of the academic year 2014/2015 three months after we took up the position of students' union officers we were told of the introduction of a charge for the college doctor of fifteen euro. An issue which I hope you agree is something that should have be discussed with us previously.

Instead we discovered this information from a student of the college. We do not agree with the payment whatsoever and we understand that the college doctor also has reservations about this fee. It is entirely unprofessional to not disseminate this information to the student representatives when it is was first discussed and agreed in management.

I understand that other colleges charge for their doctors, although as NCAD provide absolutely no facilities for their students as provided in other colleges, it was as I understand agreed that the college doctor would then be subsidised in full to make up for this. This gives the students the impression that the college to not truly care for students of this college.

This impression is made worse by the introduction of an annual student contribution fee of one hundred euro. The studio levee was confirmed to be essentially a student contribution fund in our meeting with Declan McGonagle and Damian Downes.

This contribution fund in NCAD is confusingly called a studio levee, to which I can assure you no student has received tangible studio materials or anything of the sort. This levee is a

student contribution. As this is a student contribution, it is said to be by the HEA that it is best practice for this to be voted on.

I personally, asked Declan and Damian for this to be voted on in October and to date nothing has been organised. I understand that whether the students vote, either yes or no on the matter, the management of the college still have final say on the matter. I have no issues with this. Still however I feel that the management of NCAD should respect the students enough to give them a say on the matter. The students' union have also asked for the title of the 'Studio Levee' to be changed to something that better explains where their money actually goes, as of yet nothing has been done.

The 'Art in the Digital World' masters course fees have gone up from 2,850 euros to 3,900 euros this year without any warning. The students only became aware of this rise when they went to pay their fees in September. As the increase was a surprise for some, 3 of the 7 students involved in the course decided that the fee was now too high and that they could not afford to pay the increased fee. These students subsequently left the course and find that their first year was spent in vain, as nothing they have learned will have been certified. I would like to add that this is an incredibly disappointing way to have to leave your course of education having worked hard for one academic year to discover you cannot simply afford to complete it. The students have still not heard any explanation for why this increase in fees has occurred.

Discussions around the Diageo buildings for NCAD have been ongoing since 2012 (perhaps before). This is the unfortunate prelude to problems that have arisen for the master students this year. The intention with Diageo is to put the masters courses, Nival and other parts of NCAD in there as a coherent expansion process.

As it hadn't come on stream, at the beginning of this academic year (Sept 2014) Emmet house was the assigned studio building for MFA students. The students moved in with a one week delay due to negotiations. The Students' Union was told by Declan McGonagle that by Christmas of 2014 the lease to the Diageo building would be signed and the masters would move in. We then agreed that if the lease with Diageo had not been signed by the end of January that the Emmet house lease would be extended until the end of the academic year. Assurances were given in September that if Diageo wouldn't come through Emmet House would be the studio space for the whole academic year.

Emmet House had a slow start and ongoing issues. There was no heat until the beginning of December and sufficient wifi was not established. At the beginning of the second semester in January it became clear that Diageo wasn't happening and Emmet House would be the studio space until the end of the academic year.

On February 17<sup>th</sup> the MFA students were informed about the termination of the lease in Emmet house for February 28<sup>th</sup>. The management of NCAD hadn't secured the lease of the

building until the end of the term. At this meeting alternative spaces were yet to be resolved and students were in complete shock. On the morning of February 18<sup>th</sup> some of the heads of departments met with students and said they didn't have enough room for them within their departments. In the afternoon students met with Declan McGonagle and Philip Napier and a yet to be renovated Frawley's was proposed for studios. Frawley's was not shown to students on that day. Alternative spaces were also being looked for in the already overpopulated and cramped NCAD campus. This weak solution would not have only affected the postgrads but also impacted the undergraduate studies.

In these meetings the masters students learned that NCAD had the Emmet house lease only until the end of December and from then on was working on a month to month license. Apparently the landlord wanted to end the license by the end of February and was difficult to deal with.

Since proposed spaces were not sufficient students started to look into other premises on the street and also made direct contact with the Emmet House landlord. Based on the students' efforts the landlord reached out to NCAD, but no agreement was reached.

On the morning of February 26<sup>th</sup> a meeting was held in the proposed new space, Frawley's. It was rapidly established that the building was by no means ready for students to move into and proceed with their practice. Students were getting really frustrated with the very difficult position the college had put them in, especially since they were supposed to vacate Emmet House the following day. During this meeting students made Damian aware that the landlord had emailed him that morning in regards to the renting of Emmet house.

Students asked Damian to read out this email. In it, the landlord said that he was willing to negotiate a few months lease upon reasonable terms. Damian called the landlord right there and then and agreed on a deal. How the extension of the lease was not previously made without the intervention of the students is beyond me.

For students involved in an intense and professional course such as a masters, to be given ten days notice on losing their studios and not be offered a good alternative is absolutely unprofessional. This whole debacle cost them two working weeks. However they were able to negotiate open Saturdays for the remainder of the semester.

As of yet there is no plan laid out for next years masters course building and it would not be surprising to see the masters students in a similar position in the next academic year.

Next year, the first group of the new three year course will be having the graduation show at the same time as the last group of the four year course. Despite Octavian bringing this matter to the board in January there has not been any action taken to establish a committee to start handling this issue so as not to be entirely and unnecessarily place stress on all the final year students. I worry whether anyone genuinely has a vision for this college and it's students.

I must express the lack of confidence and trust the students have in the management of NCAD. Morale is extremely low.

It is with great disappointment, anxiety, stress and utmost concern for the education of the students here in NCAD that I respectfully voice my opinion to you the chairman of An Bord.

-NCADSU