

## Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board  
Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2023 – Via MS Teams, 17:00**

**Present:**

Al Linforth (Chair and President) – AL  
Meg Lee (VP Student Activities) – ML  
Gemma Allcott (VP Education) – GA  
Rebekah Williams (Lay Trustee) – RW  
Margaret Jolley (Lay Trustee) – MJ  
Melanie Brittain (Lay Trustee) - MB  
Matthew Osborne (Student Trustee) – MO  
Dylan Dudley (Student Trustee) – DD  
Erin Boddice (Student Trustee) – EB

**In attendance:**

Samina Fiaz (SU HR Coordinator, also Minute Secretary) – SF  
Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) – SW

**1. Attendance and Apologies**

Apologies received for Matthew Payne (Student Trustee) – MP

**2. a) Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the Board 12/12/22**

Minutes of the meeting were approved.

**b) Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

**3. Matters arising**

None

**4. Declarations of Conflicts of Interest (including Register of declarations of Interest)**

None declared.

**5. Chief Executive Officer Report**

SW updated the board on key SU activities as follows:

- The University have confirmed that there will be no increase in the block grant for 2023/24 (so will remain at £600K). This is not in line with the sector as most Unions have had an automatic increase of 5% for increased staffing costs, even if not for other reasons. The University have given their reasons for not increasing the SU block grant, mainly related to their financial position and concerns over recruitment. The Finance Subcommittee asked if a meeting could be arranged for them with Senior University finance staff and the Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Students to let them know the particular challenges faced by the SU and the Hangar Bar

which is now providing limited profits, so is essentially a service. The meeting request was declined but a conversation was had via email between SW and the PVC but it is highly unlikely that the block grant will be increased.

- Ticket sales for Varsity events have gone well but due to increased costs, it is unlikely that there will be a profit and as yet this is unclear as the Cricket event is yet to take place (was postponed due to weather conditions).
- The University was approached to make a contribution to transport costs for the summer ball bearing in mind that any student can attend and that students have been requesting this event for many years. The request was declined and so this event will no longer be going ahead as this would result in a c£6K loss for the Union which is not appropriate at present therefore the booking with the Bank House hotel is being cancelled and the deposit lost. Students would be refunded their tickets as the only way this event could go ahead would be to charge £55 per ticket which is not an acceptable amount to expect students to pay given the Cost-of-Living crisis.

A colleague in Estates is trying to seek help from the University for a marquee to support an alternative event outside. This would be less formal than the summer ball but still an opportunity for students to have fun and for the SU to create an end of year 'festival' style atmosphere for students. We will wait to here if this is a viable possibility.

- There is a trend towards increased engagement with the Hangar but lower spend and so plans are being devised to address this, including putting on events that would normally take place weekly, to take place monthly.
- The post-Rugby Varsity event in the Hangar was a success, generating £3.5K income for the Hangar but profit was minimal due to a need to sensibly reduce prices for students. Engagement, however, was very good and so hopefully this will continue in the future.
- Student staff recruitment is under way and the SU are looking at reducing opening hours for the WD over the summer to reduce costs further.
- The University has removed its' band 3 salaries and will be looking at removing salary band 4, in line with increases to the living wage and the increase in the cost of living. MJ explained that the SU's pay scales do not need to be in line with the University's pay scales. The benchmarking conducted by the SU as part of the Pay and Reward review last year involved benchmarking against other SU's and the intention was never to match University pay scales. It was agreed that the SU would review pay again in August as they do each year. The Director of Finance and Commercial would prepare some options for staff pay increases and share with the Board.

**Action:** The Director of Finance and Commercial to have the recommendations for staff pay increase ready for the May board meeting.

- There have been significant issues with Men's football this year and so the SU is in the process of working with the Sport department to agree a revised structure for the club going forwards, as the players need more direction. The SU has asked for meetings with the University to discuss this. The committee elections have been suspended in the interim. There

- are a couple of responsible students who are interested in committee positions which is positive news for the club.
- The Leadership Elections turn out this year was reasonable, given the number of candidates was lower than previous years. Voter turnout was 12% which is very much in line with the sector average. The elections were overall very positive and GA and ML were commended for their support on Elections committee. The results night was much fun and enjoyed by all.
  - Varsity has been fantastic and a further update on this would be given in the Officer report. Teamwork during events amongst the staff team at the SU has been really pleasing.
  - The SU is trying to hold the University to account where necessary and are trying to ensure the Officers are being heard as this has at times been challenging. The University strategy runs until 2024 and they have confirmed that it will be reviewed before then.

## **6. SUSS AGM 2023**

SW gave an update from the recent annual SUSS AGM. Key points from the meeting were as follows:

- SUSS are very happy to meet with and speak to Trustees, as they have done so at other SU's this year, to answer any questions they may have.
- Regarding the legal issues, they continue to press Friends Provident regarding the data they hold and once they know more, they will be able to decide on a way forwards in terms of whether they will hold them to account for the advice they were given at the start of the scheme.
- Cost of living issues were discussed, as well as the affects of changing Cabinets and Prime Ministers, and the war in Ukraine.
- SUSS propose to extend the recovery period until May 2037 (from 2035) and then sell off the scheme to an insurance company. They recognise that they need to build in £3m in reserves to pay for this. They also understand that SU's nationally are struggling and so they have asked for all SU's in the scheme to send some information which they can analyse in order to gain a better understanding of SU's. SU's will be grouped into one of three groups depending on their income and revenue streams. This will enable SUSS to be better informed when making future decisions about the scheme.
- They have confirmed that repayments will not increase above the budgeted 5%.
- There is a slight increase in the deficit to £140m, making it approx. 47% funded.
- By 2037 they intend to be winding up the scheme and beneficiaries will likely be informed of the plan much nearer the time.

## **7. Strategic Planning – initial report on insight data**

The report from Marianne at Queen Mary SU is really pleasing and she has confirmed that the SU has enough data for the report and so won't need to collect any more. However, the SU will need to continue to consult student groups in the future as part of the ongoing strategy.

There are five areas which can form part of a strategy moving forwards. These are stress and anxiety, finance issues, holding the University to account, making sure the SU is not prioritising certain groups over others, and making sure that the SU is not stressful to engage with, isn't bureaucratic and to simplify its' processes.

SW and the SU's Marketing, Communications and Commercial Manager convened with Marianne earlier today to discuss the report which will be shared with the staff team as soon as possible. Five different working groups will be formed to address the five areas identified and staff will be able to volunteer to be part of these. This outcome and ideas from the working groups will form a strategic framework which will feed into the new strategic plan.

RW added that the data will be really useful should the SU wish to apply for grants in the future as many grant applications are driven by how you can demonstrate community engagement. In addition, many grants are less focussed on quantitative data, rather on stories and impact.

#### **8. Monthly Management Accounts – February 2023**

The board approve the accounts.

#### **9. 2023/24 Draft Budget Submission**

The SU will be submitting a deficit budget for the first time this year, due to staffing and other costs. The SU are at their limit in terms of covering their costs without accessing the reserves.

**Action:** some of the role titles in the budget submission have not been updated to the new role titles so require updating.

The board discuss the potential catering offer within the Hangar which has been included in the budget on the assumption that this will be going ahead.

SW gave an update on the possibility of this and conversations with the University about this and confirmed that nothing had been agreed yet but it is hoped that this might happen. There is also a potential alternative of a joint venture with the University which would pose less financial risk and profits could be shared.

The board approve the draft budget submission.

#### **10. Finance Procedures Manual and Reserves Policy**

The finance subcommittee have reviewed the policy. MJ suggested some amendments which are not related to accounting practices but more to bring the SU in line with more modern practices such as changing the way documents are stored. These changes would align more with flexible working arrangements too.

**Action:** SW to liaise with the Director of Finance & Commercial to discuss and update the policy.

The board would then review the policy again at the May meeting.

Note subsequent to the Board meeting:

The above was discussed further by email and it was agreed that the Finance Procedures manual would be approved as it stands as the content reflects the current processes and procedures. It was agreed that some processes and

procedures do require modernisation in order to avoid business continuity risks and to improve efficiency. However, it was recognised that this could not be achieved by May due to the need to prioritise preparation for the annual audit, which this year will be conducted against some new, more rigorous, accounting standards.

The SU would discuss changes to financial procedures with the Auditors, and if needed, outsource this task, with a view to improving these over the summer, ready for the new financial year in August.

### **11. Annual report of external speakers**

Item for information. No discussion needed.

### **12. Board Sub-committees**

a. The finance subcommittee (in March) discussions included:

- The management accounts
- A re-forecast for 2023
- Financial Procedures Manual
- SUSS update
- University finance update.

Discussions were had following the February accounts and questions raised by Student Trustee, MP, regarding the Union's response to the financial challenges it is facing. (This resulted in the meeting, as mentioned in the CEO report above, being requested with the PVC Students and PVC Finance and Resources, which was declined).

b. The HR subcommittee discussions at the last meeting in March included:

- The terms of reference were reviewed
- An update on Staff Savvy
- An update on staffing matters, eg probationary reviews and the review of the SU's Performance Appraisal Process
- Revisions to the SU's recruitment process
- Agreed principles for the SU's approach to recruitment and promotion (shared with the board as part of the CEO report)
- Staff benefits guide

### **13. Officers' report**

ML, GA and AL updated the board on recent activities, as follows:

- On Autism Awareness day recently, the SU committed to working with the University to create the Autism friendly campus plan and to progress work on this.
- The community cupboard has received £1170 worth of donations and an application for further funding for this is under way to ensure the SU can continue with this service as donations have slowed down recently.
- It is currently Ramadan and following feedback from students, an all-student email was sent confirming the location of the prayer room, promoting the University run community iftar and how to support students



- during Ramadan. Religious observance policy discussions are on-going with the University.
- The engagement of academic reps has been very good this year. Students have been very engaged at school rep and course rep forums. Feedback from reps has generally been good with some areas of inconsistency or concern reported.
  - The process for applying for mitigating circumstances needs reviewing and so this is a project which AL will continue to move forwards in the next academic year. Some universities have a self-certification process for mitigating circumstances and so this is something to be considered at Worcester.
  - 'Pizza with the PVC' has been arranged for students to be able to meet with senior University staff as students feel they don't have the opportunity to talk with senior leaders at the University or know who they are. If the event is successful, it will be held periodically.
  - GA and ML attended the NUS National conference last month. International students nationally are voicing their concerns around not being properly supported by Universities. With there being no cap on University fees, Universities have the option to increase them during a course of study which is a cause for much concern among International students. There is also no Hardship funding for international students at Worcester whereas this is offered by some other Universities and so the Officers will continue to lobby the University for this. The 20-hour working cap is also a concern as some students are being exploited and forced to work in cash-in-hand jobs which are low-paid. These concerns were reported back to the PVC Students. Other discussion sessions at NUS conference included housing, the cost-of-living crisis, education and scrutiny of the NUS.
  - The Paramedic Society and RaG Committee ran a CPR-athon recently. Engagement from clubs and societies and students generally was excellent and the event was enjoyed by all.
  - Varsity took place recently with the SU beating Gloucester, 12 points to 10. Sportsmanship was amazing as well as the spectators, students and staff.

#### **14. Executive Committee summary**

Main discussions at Executive Committee which was held earlier in the day included, as well as standard items, active policies, and current projects:

- Approval of a music society
- The RAG team and what needs to be done to move forwards strategically.
- Dudley campus project (update from SW)

#### **15. Student Council Summary**

Student Council had convened in February and were updated on the Elections, Student Choice Awards and the then upcoming NUS Conference. Three policy proposals had come through (via Education Council initially) which had all been approved:

- A student had noticed that the University did not have a mental health policy and so the Officers would lobby the University to

provide one so that students can access this resource if they need to when faced with mental health issues.

- To lobby the University to create a module withdrawal policy as sometimes modules are withdrawn by the University and students end up being automatically assigned to modules which may not be suitable.
- A proposal to form a City Campus Development Board to be formed to work towards supporting student concerns around lack of services at City Campus.

The committee held further discussions on City Campus and the disparity in student experience between campuses. The Officers continue to discuss the possibility of a Common room at Jenny Lind building with the University and are awaiting approval for plans for this.

### 16. Board of Governors summary

A full board meeting as well as a Board Development Session had taken place since the last Trustee Board meeting.

At the Development session the Officers were given a tour of the campus and the Officers fed back some building improvements that were needed.

A presentation about social value was given and a discussion on the Board Effectiveness review which had taken place in 2019 and the recommendations from this.

[Commercial in Confidence]

### 17. Any Other Business

An Appointments panel is being arranged for MJ's replacement and an initial meeting has been had with a potential replacement trustee.

DD will also be leaving us at the end of the academic year and so a Student Trustee vacancy will be advertised in due course.

The new Officers-elect will be invited to the next Trustee Board meeting.

**Date of next meeting: 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023, 6pm**

### Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
The Director of Finance and Commercial to have the recommendations for staff pay increase ready for the May board meeting.	RC (Director of Finance and Commercial)	May
Some of the role titles in the budget submission have not been updated to the new role titles so require updating.	RC (Director of Finance and Commercial)	ASAP

SW to liaise with the Director of Finance & Commercial to discuss and update the finance procedures policy.	SW and RC (Director of Finance and Commercial)	ASAP
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