

Students' Union Trustee Board

Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Thursday 6th October 2022 – Via MS Teams, 18:00

Present:

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

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) - SW
Samina Fiaz (SU HR & Admin Coordinator, also Minute Secretary) – SF
Robert Cox (Director of Finance and Commercial) - RC

1. Attendance and Apologies

No apologies

Item 7 is now discussed before moving onto the other agenda items, so that RC could leave the meeting after this item. See notes below, under item 7. RC leaves the meeting after item 7.

2. Appointment of new trustees

The appointment of the new Student Trustee, Erin Boddice, is approved and board members introduce themselves.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising

None

5. Declarations of Conflicts of Interest (including Register of declarations of Interest)

None declared.

SF had emailed the Declaration of Conflicts of interest form to all trustees (except those who have completed already when they joined) and requested those who have not yet returned theirs to do so as soon as possible.

6. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW updated the board on key SU activities as follows:

- 6.1 The annual insurance review has been conducted – nothing of significance to note.
- 6.2 Seven new staff members have joined the SU and are at various stages of their induction.
- 6.3 The Academic and Welfare Advisor is expected to resign after 13 years working with the SU. Her official resignation is yet to be received.
- 6.4 The Hangar Bar income is slightly down on last year and the cost of living has impacted student spending during the welcome period (some events were also cancelled due to the Queen's passing).
- 6.5 The Help and Advice service remains busy after a record year in 2021/22.
- 6.6 SW's agreed 2022/23 objectives from her appraisal with AL and the PVC (Students) are included as an appendix to the report, for information, as well as a progress update on progress against her 2021/22 objectives.
- 6.7 The Reach scheme has been replaced for first year students (non- first years would continue to receive funds from the Reach scheme) by a pilot bursary scheme called 'Get Involved'. Through this, students have been given £50 to spend on sports clubs and societies. Although a positive scheme, it was very late in being agreed by University Executive Board and, therefore, implemented with minimal consultation with the SU. This created a large amount of work for the staff team prior and throughout the welcome period. Many students were not aware that the scheme was in place and had already purchased memberships and so refunds had to be issued and there was confusion amongst different year groups about which scheme they were eligible for. Feedback has been given to the University but, on a positive note, lots of students have utilised both Reach and Get Involved to purchase memberships.
- 6.8 Networks remain a challenging area and there is much work still to be done. There are no members in the Race Equity network which is a concern but other networks are doing well, with three networks have lots of members and organising several activities.
- 6.9 The SU have commissioned MSL to overhaul the website following ongoing student feedback and the decision that making the site more accessible (including on mobiles) was a priority. The cost was not as high as expected and should represent good value for money through increased engagement.
- 6.10 The Board approve joint re-accreditation with the University for Responsible Futures (as a means to embed social responsibility and sustainability across the curriculum and wider activities).
- 6.11 Details of the SU's performance against the organisation Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in 2021/22 were provided as an appendix to the report. Performance had been variable but sound overall. The KPIs will be reviewed within the new strategic planning work stream.
- 6.12 In relation to the student written submission – all Universities are required to complete a written submission/self-assessment to the Office for Students, on how they are performing against certain benchmarks contained within the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework). SU's are also required to write a student

written submission on the University's performance from the students' perspective. Universities are supplied with various data but the OfS have stated that they are keen to hear about the 'real' student experience from SUs. This is a significant piece of work and discussions on how to commence work on this have begun. The Membership Engagement Manager would normally undertake this work but being new herself and having two new staff members, it is proposed to consider external support for this piece of work. SW has made initial contact with NUS and another external contact to source options but such support would likely come at a cost to the Union. The board discuss this further. RW offered to supply details of a company who conduct insight work (and has had positive feedback from), if the above does not prove fruitful, from whom a quote could be obtained. It is also suggested that in future the SU should consider budgeting for insight work in order to invest in this important area of work.

Action: SW and RC to include a budget for insight work in the future.

7. End of year Audit / Cost of living issues

Before moving onto the cost-of-living issues, RC gives an update on the recent audit. The audit report has been received, the audit went very well and the auditors seemed pleased with the organisation and availability of information. No issues were raised from the audit. The only highlighted potential exposure risk to the SU was VAT. Recent HMRC tribunals and resultant changes to VAT law, particularly relating to SU's, could lead to a change in treatment of some VAT-able supplies. The main changes are relating to food provision of which the SU currently has none. It is a recommendation that the SU undertakes a VAT review in the future although there is no current deemed risk and therefore no immediate action is required. It was agreed that MB, in the first instance, would contact Andrea Marshall (now at BUFDG, previously Uni of Worcester Tax Advisor) to see if she would undertake such a review, prior to enrolling the support of tax specialists.

[Commercial in confidence]

Action: MB to contact Andrea Marshall (VAT advisor) in relation to options for a tax review.

RC is thanked for all his efforts in relation to the audit, which he largely completed alone, in the absence of a Finance Assistant. The board are informed that the auditors would be attending the next board meeting to present the end of year accounts.

SW discusses some potential upcoming costs for the SU, including sourcing external advice for race equity work (if deemed necessary), the SU offices will be re-configured (due to lack of space with a growing team) at a cost of approx. £2K. Following a disability audit of the SU, some recommendations were made which the SU will need to consider such as signage, the stairs in the Hangar, layout of the Welcome Desk area and the furniture in this space which is not suitable for students with a range of visible and hidden disabilities.

Regarding the rise in the cost of living, the board discussed various options to support staff including, a one-off payment, flexible working (e.g. compressed hours, hybrid working etc.), selling /buying annual leave/TOIL, financial planning information and advice, staff loans, help with travel costs. The variable rates of student staff pay was also discussed and whether this should be standardised to help students at this time and try and compete with pay offered by the University and other local employers.:

The board felt that it was important to have a package of options and information for staff to suit different needs. They agree that RC and SW will work on costs to the Union of the various options to be discussed further by the Finance Sub Committee who would then make recommendations to the full board asap.

Action: RC and SW to liaise on costs for various options to support staff with the increase to the cost of living. The Finance Subcommittee would then discuss and make recommendations to the full board.

8. Terms of reference for the Board 2022/23

- 8.1 The terms of reference have been updated and the board approved the terms of reference.

9. WSU Operational Plan 2022/23

SW gave an overview of the plan, which focusses on the following areas of work:

- Address the areas from NSS and CSS where rates of satisfaction with the SU were lower.
- Increase social media and website engagement, as well as capturing more on video.
- Increase the number of societies.
- Focus more on City Campus and Jenny Lind.
- Support and grow the networks.
- Increase awareness of ideas forum (and use Change week).
- Deliver Student panels.
- Complete a student written submission.
- Increase course rep interaction with the SU e.
- Increase support for students around exams and timetables.
- Governance and democracy – increase awareness around what Student Council does.
- Recruitment of a new Lay Trustee (prior to MJ leaving in May 2023).
- Engage students in politics and questioning the government.
- Ensure the All Student Meeting is quorate and more engaging.
- The Hangar – to increase diversity of events, to review the food offer and develop a strategic business plan for the Hangar,
- Continue the EDI workstream, through a comprehensive action plan.
- Help and Advice focus on wellbeing, cost of living, housing and mitigating circumstances, as well as the student futures manifesto which is the commitment to supporting students after the Covid pandemic.
- Increase the number of societies.

- Reset volunteering to engage more students, including developing the relationship with WARS, our Charity of the Year.
- RAG – review the structure and process.
- People and culture work such as non-pay staff benefits, review the PPA (Personal Performance Appraisal) process, embed the new Staff Consultative Forum, recruitment, Employee Engagement Survey results and Staff Savvy.
- Review of the Union’s Pension scheme to look for more affordable options for staff.
- Health & Safety – look at processes such as risk assessments; and continue to lobby the University around building issues.
- Sustainability – introduction of a repair café, a breastfeeding clinic, helping students to recycle and reuse (with the cost of living) and supporting the Sustainability Network as part of our GISU (Green Impact Students’ Union) workstream.
- Encouraging more students to relate their involvement in the SU to the employability through workshops and advice on our website.

10. Appointment of Deputy Returning Officer and Returning Officer (elections) for 2022/23

SW explained the roles of both officers and confirmed that Val Yates (Director of Access and Inclusion at the University) had agreed to continue as DRO again this year. The RO for many SU’s is NUS and so would continue to be so for the SU. The Board approved these appointments.

11. Appointment of Lead Trustee for 2022/23

RW is now the Deputy Chair of the Board and so there is a vacancy for a Lead Trustee. MJ and MB to decide over email who will take on the role this year.

Action: MB and MJ to agree who will be Lead Trustee.

12. Board Sub-committees

12.1 The finance subcommittee discussions included:

- an update on year end and the audit
- student staff wages (in the context of the cost of living)
- review of processes for when the CE is absent
- current commercial contracts
- Hangar sales

12.2 The HR subcommittee had convened earlier, with discussions including:

- New staff members (7 joined over the summer)
- Non-pay rewards for staff
- Staff Consultative Forum updates
- Implementation of Staff Savvy HR software
- Review of the SU’s EDI Policy

13. Officers’ report

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

- Welcome Festival which had been a big success.
- Training for School Reps, Networks, Club and Society committees, as well as RAG.
- New Sports clubs and societies applications have been received.
- The Officers have set their objectives for the year.
- TeamWorc TV to be re-instated this year.
- Plans for delivering Change week.
- Recreational sport initiatives to be developed with the University. RW suggested that there might be funding available for this via the Commonwealth Games legacy funds, which can be accessed through the Active Partnership.
- Two of AL's manifesto points have been achieved already – the Pets for therapy dogs have resumed visits on campus, as well as the re-design of the SU website.
- Community cupboard will start next month – students can donate or take food as required.
- Academic Representation system – the aim is to engage reps more after difficulties with this last year. GA has introduced a reward and recognition scheme for reps which will lead to bronze, silver or gold accreditation at the end of the year, as well as pin badges for reps of the month. Course Rep conference in December is being planned, which will include themes on employability, diversity and sustainability. External speakers from NUS and other SU's will be attending.
- Lobbying the University on decolonisation of the curriculum.
- Open panel forums to be held for students to be able to ask senior University staff questions.

14. Executive Committee summary

Two Exec committee meetings have taken place so far. Key discussions included the Women's workout hours and ensuring facilities are available at the weekend, as well as a common room in Jenny Lind building to improve the social space there. The cost of living will be discussed regularly as want to be transparent with students on this. A letter was sent to Robin Walker MP, who has agreed to meet with the Officers at the beginning of November, to find out if the government will be doing anything to support students with the cost of living. TEF will continually feature at the committee going forwards. New societies will be approved at Exec committee and Lacrosse and Mindfulness have already been approved as new societies, outside of Exec committee.

15. Student Council Summary

Student Council had not convened yet this semester but is due to take place later in the month, on 25th October.

16. Board of Governors summary

An update was given on discussions at the last Board of Governors meeting. The board discussions included the Dudley campus, key priorities moving forwards including student retention and addressing the areas of concern around student satisfaction following the NSS results.

[Commercial in confidence].

17. Any Other Business

None

Date of next meeting: 30th November 2022
Summary of Actions:

| Action | For | To be completed by |
|--|-----------|-----------------------------|
| MB and MJ to agree who will be Lead Trustee for 2022-23 | MB and MJ | ASAP |
| RC and SW to liaise on costs for various options to support staff with the increase to the cost of living. The Finance Subcommittee would then discuss and make recommendations to the full board. | SW and RC | ASAP |
| SW and RC to include a budget for insight work in the future. | SW and RC | Next year's budget planning |
| MB to contact Andrea Marshall (VAT advisor) in relation to options for a tax review. | MB | ASAP |