

Students' Union Trustee Board

Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Tuesday 22nd March 2021 – Via Zoom, 18:00

Present:

Megan Price (Chair and President) – MP
Harry South (VP Education) – HS
Tish Manning (VP Student Activities) - TM
Margaret Jolley (Lay Trustee) – MJ
Melanie Brittain (Lay Trustee) - MB
Rebekah Williams (Lay Trustee) – RW
Deborah Andrews (Student Trustee) – DA
Andrew Humphry (Student Trustee) – AH

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) - SW
Samina Fiaz (SU HR & Admin Coordinator, also Minute Secretary) – SF
Jim Dickinson, Associate Editor of WonkHE - JD; for item 2 only
Robert Cox (SU Finance and Commercial Manager) – RC for items 7 – 10 only

Apologies:

Isobel Lines (Student Trustee) - IL

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies received from IL.

2. Free Speech and Academic Freedom policy paper (published 16/02/2021 by Government)

Jim Dickinson (Associate Editor of WonkHE), was invited to the meeting to talk about the above-mentioned paper and the implications of this for Students' Unions. Following the talk, Jim is thanked for attending the meeting and providing some valuable insight and context on the policy paper.
Jim Dickinson leaves the meeting.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising

SF had forwarded the SE team presentation to all board members following receipt from the Student Engagement Coordinator.
MP had discussed mapping /reviewing relationship with University at the last Executive Committee meeting and will report back to the board at the May meeting with outcomes from that.

IL had not yet passed details to SW of potential contact re sponsorship opportunities - still to be done.

5. Declarations or conflicts of interest/ Register of declarations of interest

None declared.

6. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW updated the board on key SU activities as follows:

- 6.1 SW and the Finance and Commercial Manager had met with Tramps regarding their plans moving forwards, following re-opening of venues as part of the roadmap out of lockdown. [Commercial in confidence]
- 6.2 The SU is liaising with the University regarding plans for when the next stage of lockdown eases on 12th April. As the wellbeing garden is quite a small area and not designed to be a beer garden, plans are being discussed to erect a marquee in the car park close to the SU to operate an outdoor bar, with social distancing and Covid-compliant measures in place. Bar staff will come off furlough from 12th April but Welcome Desk staff will remain furloughed until the end of their contracts as the Welcome Desk will remain closed.
- 6.3 The new Student Voice Assistant is commencing employment with the SU next month.
- 6.4 The Advice and Support Service remains very busy. SW has facilitated a new Midlands Advice Service network for SU Advisors to be able to meet and share ideas and experiences and it is hoped will help support the SU Advisor. Options are currently being discussed as to how the workload of the Advisor can be managed and possibly shared out as demand is currently exceeding her capacity. The University have praised the work of the SU Advisor in supporting students who often feel well equipped following advice received from her.
- 6.5 Nominations for Student Choice Awards was going very well with over 700 nominations so far.
- 6.6 Sports and Societies – performance sport is being reviewed, regarding what is classed as a performance sport as it is felt that it is a little outdated and no longer fit for purpose. The criteria around performance sport is being reviewed as these should be high performing teams which can support other teams. The Sport Development Board will continue to work on this as an ongoing project.
- 6.7 A new Officer team has been elected and all the candidates were praised for their conduct and effort during the elections, with special mention to AH who was also a candidate and did a sterling job. A full report on elections will be available soon. The SU held a meeting after the elections with all the candidates (the first time such a meeting has been held) to obtain some feedback which will help with future election planning and the key outcomes from the meeting will also be shared in the report.
- 6.8 The All Student Meeting went very well and was quorate for a third consecutive year, which is very positive. Numbers were lower than last year as the novelty of an online meeting had perhaps worn off. Students were put into break out groups but only one of the three groups seemed engaged so that idea will likely be shelved.

- 6.9 The EDI working group met again today and a draft EDI policy has gone to the HR Subcommittee for approval. Once approved and finalised this will be shared with the staff team and the full board. The working group will focus on the area of Marketing and Communication within the organisation as a first task (as to how EDI can be improved in this area of work) and then move onto other areas.
- 6.10 The impact report has been shared with the trustee board electronically with physical copies to be sent out in due course.
- 6.11 The SU is working on the annual Big Worc Survey with plans to issue this as soon as possible to maximise student engagement with it, before they finish for the academic year.
- 6.12 SW is meeting monthly with Tim Jones (acting Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor Students) in order to maintain the relationship with the University in the interim arrangements until a substantive postholder is appointed.

7. SUSS AGM

- 7.1 SW updated the board on the key information and financial figures from the SUSS AGM. Overall, the picture is still concerning, with the scheme somewhere between 46% and 48% funded.
- 7.2 The Charity Commission had emailed all SU's in relation to the SUSS Pension deficit requesting their feedback and SW had written back on 12th January 2021 but had not yet received a response. The email from SW assured that the SU has been following the Charity Commission recommendations for SU's who have a large pension deficit such as obtaining valuations, considering the implications to the SU finances, reviewing obligations to continue to deliver charitable objectives, ensuring annual budgets, and Trustees to receive an on-going analysis of the deficit and monthly account, as well as seeking relevant specialist advice where applicable.

8. Monthly Management Accounts – Jan 2021

- 8.1 Considering the continuing pandemic, the SU finances are in a sound position. Use of the furlough scheme, where appropriate, had been invaluable in keeping costs down and so finances up to February were better than forecast. Annual forecasts for expected losses are looking better than expected too, again due to the SU taking the steps it did (including negotiating on contracts) to control costs. This meant that the reserves were looking healthy for the next financial year. Overall, the financial picture is sound for the SU and better than had been expected last year.
RW suggested looking into a cash back scheme for SU expenditure and provided further information on the different ways the scheme worked and how the SU could utilise it.
DA also recommended looking into the 'Pack it in' scheme and DA and MP agree to discuss this further outside of the meeting.
The financial management is praised as without the hard work of the Finance and Commercial Manager and his efforts to achieve real results for the SU, the financial situation could have been a lot different.

9. Finance Procedures Manual and Reserves Policy

Both the finance procedures manual and the reserves policy were reviewed at the last Finance subcommittee meeting. RW updated the board on the main changes (of which there were not many this year) and the board approved both.

10. Draft Budget 2021/22

The proposals for the budget submission had not changed since the January meeting. The board approved the formal budget submission for 2021-22.

11. Bye Law 4 (Governance Academic Representation, and Decision Making)

MP updated the board on some changes that needed to be approved by the board to Bye law 4. The amendment has been approved by Student Council and the board also approved.

12. Annual report of external speakers

SW referred the board to the paper regarding this as the report is submitted annually, with nothing significant to report.

HS suggested that future reports could include who the external speakers were, for the information of the reader, so this will be taken on board for future reports.

13. Board Sub-committees

13.1 HS updated the board on key discussions from the HR subcommittee which included:

- Probationary progress for staff and the new Student Voice Assistant commencing in role next month.
- Update on staff furlough, including student staff.
- Student staff recruitment.
- The Kickstart scheme.
- Potential support for the Student Advisor.
- The (NUS-sourced) Employee Engagement Survey, results of which will be available at the next meeting.
- Updated terms of reference.

13.2 MP updated the board on key discussions from the finance subcommittee which included:

- Updates to the Finance Procedures manual.
- Audit tender summary and choosing the existing Auditors, Knox Cropper (and the reasons for this), for the next audit contract.
- Terms of reference review
- Budget review
- Furlough scheme review, sponsorships and other finance efficiencies discussed.

14. Officers' report

TM updated the board on various recent SU activities, as follows:

- MP had been working hard with the networks and advocating for them.
- MP had been working with Chartwells, and has brought them to Welfare and Inclusion council to discuss a more diverse food range on campus.
- MP did a great deal to help run Go Green week which was a very successful online event with good engagement by staff and students. The panel included the University VC who talked about sustainable leadership in higher education.
- MP led on the running of LGBTQ+ history month and international women's day alongside the networks, with good outcomes achieved. The networks worked incredibly hard in their delivery and involvement in these events.
- University mental health day, and the 27-27 challenge (running 27miles in 27 days in solidarity with the 27% of students who report mental health concerns). Around £2,600 had been raised (at the time of writing) by students through this event for mental health charities.
- TM had prepared and sent out care packages to 176 students (and 306 children), with the initiative being featured on local news and radio, as well as on NUS platforms.
- TM had set up the Pen Pal scheme, to which 41 students signed up and Pen Pal details have been shared.
- HS had been working hard on liaising with new SERCCs (Student Engagement, Representation and Communication Co-ordinators) in Schools such as Science and the Environment and Nursing and Midwifery and a 'SERCC of the Year' Award had been introduced.
- HS had been working hard delivering a lot of Course Rep training and had been involved in Education Council with various plans discussed at meetings.
- HS had held various Repstival sessions throughout the year.
- Team Worc committee had taken place with TM leading those and meeting with Clubs and Societies separately.
- Varsity – 11 sports teams will be participating and meetings have been held individually with those teams who would not be participating to explain decisions and to give teams the opportunity to ask questions. Most teams had been very understanding and discussions were ongoing with those who were somewhat unhappy. Meetings had been held with participating teams to discuss plans and explain the rules to them, particularly around ensuring Covid- secure competitions. Course assessments had been extended so students were also made aware of the potential impact of this on their Varsity commitment, and that any concerns around their study would result in non-participation.
- The current RAG total stood at just over £26K which was a fantastic achievement to date.
- The new Officers have been elected in, with a fantastic line up of candidates during the elections period.

15. Executive Committee minutes

An update from the last meeting included:

- Approval of three new societies – The Nigerian Society, The Criminology Society and Believers Love World Campus Ministry
- Ideas on a new book swap initiative

- Discussions on how to engage healthcare students in elections in the future as engagement is generally low from students on these courses, especially with student numbers growing on these courses.

16. Student Council Summary

The Student Networks continued to be well engaged, submitting five policies on a range of issues such as menu diversity, multi-faith room/s, and gender-neutral toilets with some good outcomes expected as a result of these policies.

There were updates from sub councils and committees as well as the bye law amendment brought to the Board.

A Covid-19 discussion was held in relation to the impact of this on the return to teaching on campus. Discussions included ensuring a smooth transition for students from online to face-to-face teaching.

The various SU student committees and councils are currently undergoing elections of committee/council positions. SW updated the board about the national concern of the impact of the pandemic on the engagement of some clubs and societies and their sustainability. The SU is keeping an eye on this and also keeping the University informed as the assumption cannot be made that all will go back to being as it previously was, after the pandemic. A lot of work will be needed to re-engage some areas of student forums and committees, as well as clubs and societies.

17. Board of Governors summary

Some progress has been made on changing the name of the HR committee to People and Culture committee which is a positive shift. The committee has agreed to increase work in the area of EDI for both staff and students which is positive news. This aligns well with the SU's commitment to EDI work.

New governors are due to be appointed, with MP sitting on the appointments panel. The calibre of candidates is excellent and their commitment to EDI will also form part of the assessment process.

Board of governors have been convening more regularly which has been positive for the Officers as they have had more opportunities to share and discuss ideas and provide feedback on student issues.

18. Any Other Business

MP raised the point about the structure of trustee board meetings. External speakers or SU staff are sometimes invited to meetings, so it was worth thinking about whether these presentations should be held within Trustee Board meetings or as separate meetings, as they can at times be somewhat lengthy. The board agreed to think about this and agree any changes outside of the meeting.

Date of next meeting: 25th May 2021

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
None		

DRAFT