

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Thursday 25th May 2023 – Via MS Teams, 18:00**

Present:

Al Linforth (Chair and President) – AL
Meg Lee (VP Student Activities) – ML
Gemma Allcott (VP Education) – GA
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
Matthew Payne (Student Trustee) – MP

In attendance:

Samina Fiaz (SU HR Coordinator, also Minute Secretary) – SF
Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) – SW
Sebastian James (VP Education elect) - SJ

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies received for Rebekah Williams (Lay Trustee) – RW

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising

1. The Director of Finance and Commercial to have the recommendations for staff pay increase ready for the May board meeting – done.
2. Some of the role titles in the budget submission have not been updated to the new role titles so require updating – done.
3. SW to liaise with the Director of Finance & Commercial to discuss and update the finance procedures policy – done.

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:

- A brief update was given on the budget and the Hangar (this was discussed in depth at the Finance Subcommittee). The Hangar had seen increased levels of engagement this year but sales had been low, largely due to the Cost of Living crisis [commercial in confidence]. MB and MP are thanked for their input at Finance Subcommittee meetings during what has been a financially challenging year for the SU.

- Regarding staffing, recent staff changes / departures were discussed and an update given on plans regarding replacement roles bearing in mind budgetary challenges [commercial in confidence].
Student staff recruitment is complete and numbers of applications have been better compared to recent years.
- Regarding the Employee Engagement survey results, which have been discussed in detail at the HR Subcommittee meeting, a pulse survey was held this year focussing on the areas from last years survey that the SU did not do as well as hoped in. The student staff survey results were largely very pleasing. An area that was identified for improvement was how the SU can communicate better with the student staff team about what is going on in the rest of the organisation, particularly for the bar team, which will be discussed further. The other area for improvement was for student staff to be given more feedback on their work. For core staff, SW highlighted the areas where improvements had been made on the previous year, areas which remained static and areas which declined (of which there were only two). The results will be shared with the staff team and their views will be sought in relation to how improvements could be made. There had been some very pleasing improvements, particularly in relation to staff responses on how fairly they felt rewarded for the work they did and this was, hopefully, a result of all the work the Board and management had done in this area of late,
- Plans for the Officer induction are under way. The Help and Advice Service is seeing case numbers gradually increase with the upcoming appeals period approaching.
- An EDI report is produced each year around the time of the anniversary of the death of George Floyd, to measure EDI work against the SU's action plan. The EDI report had just been approved by the HR Subcommittee and will be published on the SU website imminently.
- The results of the Course Experience Survey were very pleasing and a good improvement in last year overall (+11%). The Rep scheme has had a very good year and GA's work in this area has had a very positive impact on the Course Reps, who have become much more engaged and visible this year as well as rewarded for their efforts.
- Intervention and regulation of higher education is an on-going theme and is felt to be very onerous at present. In order to demonstrate their commitment to widening participation, the University have to write an Access and Participation plan every few years. This has highlighted areas where the University needs to improve in terms of retention and progression such as with students from poor backgrounds, BAME students, disabled students and those who come to University via a non-A level route. Universities are now also required by the Office for Students (OfS) to produce an Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) which will highlight the student groups which are at the greatest risk of not attending, progressing or succeeding at University. Students' views must also be sought now as part of this work and so the SU is now required to produce a student submission, as well as trying to engage students in the process. This is all required to be completed by early July and so concerns around the timings for the submission have been raised with the OfS via NUS, as

students are less engaged at the end of the academic year and many have already finished.

- Freedom of speech in higher education has recently been questioned in Government and there is a sense that Universities and higher education institutions have been stifling free speech. In order to address this, the government have created a free speech champion through the OfS. The OIA (Office of the Independent Adjudicator) is concerned about this and the resulting confusion it could cause for students as the free speech champion can receive complaints from students regarding any infringements of free speech.
- Organisations are increasingly being judged by stakeholders and prospective employees on their ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) credentials. A webinar attended by SW encouraged SU's to detail their commitments to ESG on their websites and so SW will work on this with the Marketing, Communications and Commercial Manager.
- In terms of strategic planning, staff workshops have been held to look at the five different challenges and themes identified through the insight work. It is hoped that three aims can be agreed on under each challenge, and also a vision, a mission and values for the new strategic plan. Staff feedback on the process has been very good and they appreciate being involved and having some time out to think about the SU's aims.
- In conclusion, it has been a very busy year and the pressure on the SU to continue to deliver as much as possible continues.
- SW thanked the current Officer team who have worked extremely hard this year and made significant headway in projects that usually take much longer to progress.

6. Operational/Strategic planning

SW gave a summary of progress against the operational plan. Only 10% of the plan has not been achieved and that was largely due to staffing and capacity (or a lack of progress on the University's side) so overall a very successful year with 90% of objectives completed or largely completed.

7. August 2023 pay award

In the draft 2023-24 budget, there was provision for a pay award for staff applicable from August. The Board had requested for some alternative options to be brought to this meeting given the SU's financial position. Discussions had already taken place at the Finance Subcommittee meeting last week. MB and MJ explained the position with regards to the budget and SU reserves and the board discuss this in detail [commercial in confidence]. The Board approve the proposed pay award for staff, which will now be communicated to them with an explanation of the principles behind it.

8. Proposal re Network Bursaries

AL, GA, the Director of Representation and Membership Services and the Student Communities Coordinator had been working on a proposal for network committee bursaries (similar to school rep bursaries), which was one of AL's manifesto points when re-elected to the role of President. They had been working with the University's Director of Access and Inclusion to

establish how best to seek this funding from the University and it was suggested to try and include networks as part of the Academic Representation system so that funding could be sought from the University's Learning and Teaching budget. The proposal will be presented in June to AROG (University's Academic Representation Oversight Group) highlighting the importance of Networks. Network members this year have dropped significantly from over 300 to 111. The initial higher numbers were during the pandemic when it seemed students were looking for opportunities to interact virtually. Numbers have since dropped and it has been a challenge engaging students with any form of volunteering this year. This trend has been seen across the SU sector, largely fuelled by the Cost-of-Living crisis. Of the 10 networks, funding will be sought for 7 of these, with one network being disbanded (due to a persistent lack of student engagement) and alternative provisions available for the other two. The proposal will be for each of the 7 networks to receive two bursaries for a chair and vice chair, of £150 per semester. If approved, these would operate with similar guidelines as the school rep bursaries. It is hoped that, if approved, it would help to support student representation work as well as helping with student wellbeing.

In addition, SW gave an update with regards to the football club's to update the Board [commercial in confidence].

Approval items

9. Approve appointment/s of new Lay/Student Trustee/s

The appointment of the new Lay trustee, Erica Burke, is ratified. The student trustee recruitment is in progress, with one interview having been held and the second due to take place next week.

10. Appointment of Deputy Chair of Trustee Board

RW is currently the Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board. RW would be contacted to find out if she would be happy to continue as Deputy Chair for another year and if not, then the Board could discuss this at the next meeting. Note following the meeting – RW agreed to continue with the role as Deputy Chair for the 2023/24 academic year.

11. Ratification of bank mandate signatories and Companies House Directors

The bank mandate signatories (SU Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Commercial), along with the Companies House Directors (Lay Trustees) are approved each year. With MJ leaving, EB will be added as a Companies House Director.

12. Monthly Management Accounts – April 2023

The board approve the accounts.

13. Schedule of Agenda items 2023-24

A couple of minor changes have been made and this has been shared with the Board as a paper. The board approve the schedule.

14. Honorary Life Membership Awards

Details of the membership awards have been shared via a paper and GA provides further details of the students awarded. The Board approve the Honorary Life Membership awards.

Reporting items

15. Annual report of complaints

No complaints have been received this academic year.

16. Elections report

Paper shared; no further update needed.

17. Board Sub-committees

- a. The finance subcommittee discussions included:
 - The monthly management accounts (and discussions around the Hangar and possible efficiencies or opportunities).
 - The August pay award
- b. The HR subcommittee discussions earlier included:
 - Current, recruitment and staffing update and probationary reviews
 - EDI Annual report
 - Employee Engagement survey results
 - An update on Staff Savvy

18. Officers' report

- ML, GA and AL updated the board on recent activities, as follows:
- An email had been received from the University stating that the University EDI committee would be disbanding with immediate effect and would be replaced by an EDI oversight group (which is a working group of the University Executive Board - UEB) along with an EDI forum which students and staff would be invited to. This is felt by the Officers to be a concerning development due to the lack of student voice and representation in this area going forward, as well as a potential loss of diversity in decisions made by the EDI group, due to the current lack of diversity in UEB's membership. It is, however, hoped that network committee members will be able to attend the EDI forum for student representation. The SU will be meeting with the University Pro Vice Chancellor Students next week to raise concerns about the changes in EDI working groups and AL has sent an email raising their concerns with the former Chair of the previous EDI Committee.
 - Academic Representation work has been largely successful this year despite not quite filling all the school rep positions. A rep celebration event was held recently with 36 awards issued (which in previous years was only 3-6 awards) as part of a revised award process, which was a lovely event.
 - The Officers have been working on accessibility of central services such as First Point, mental health support, counselling etc. Following student feedback of a lack of compassion in the mitigating circumstances process,

- GA and AL had started to work, in liaison with the University, on how this process can be improved for students.
- Regarding the Students Choice Awards, it was an enjoyable event despite having many challenges, which will be fed back to the University. With increasing issues and challenges with this event and minimal benefit to students, it is being considered whether this event should go ahead in coming years, particularly with the financial difficulties the SU is currently facing.
 - Some sports clubs and societies do not have committees this year but it is hoped that between now and the new academic year these will be set up and Welcome Fair will be used as an opportunity to try and engage more students in this. New sport club and society applications are also still coming in which is encouraging. Committee training took place recently which should help to keep students engaged and boost confidence in their committee roles, over the summer, ahead of the new academic year.
 - RAG fundraising is going very well with funds now at £15K which is a significant increase from a few months ago which is down to the efforts of students and also the University who recently donated to RAG. The RAG team and the Paramedic Society won a national award for National Society and Volunteering award at Reading which was a fantastic achievement.
 - Volunteering hours have been logged more consistently and regularly by students due to the efforts of the Student Communities Coordinator who has been highlighting the importance and value of this to students.

19. Executive Committee Minutes

Main discussions at Executive Committee which was held earlier this week included:

- A new sports club has been approved called Worcester Strikers which is a baseball and softball club.
- Approval of the British Sign Language society which will aim to teach sign language to as many students as possible.
- Discussions on how to improve facilities at the City Campus.
- The Women's workout hour to support women to feel safe and more confident using the gym, especially those using the gym for the first time.
- Defibrillators will be increased in numbers and will be more accessible on campus. This is being actioned in conjunction with the University.

20. Student Council Summary

Student Council had convened recently and had discussed the facilities on campus.

Some feedback was shared by students regarding celebration week which was held in the Hangar this year and so fewer students were invited, which was not well-received by some clubs and societies when the Summer Ball had to be cancelled. This will form part of the de-brief and feed in to plans for next year, taking into consideration the cost implications of hiring an external venue.

21. Board of Governors summary

The results of the Course Experience Survey were shared at the meeting, which were largely positive with improvements in many areas. The Officers delivered the SU report to the Board and raised their concerns around international students and some of the issues they were facing such as uncapped fees and a lack of access to financial hardship support. Primary teaching received an 'outstanding' accreditation following a recent Ofsted visit which is excellent news. The board also shared plans for future capital developments.
 [Commercial in Confidence]

22. Any Other Business

At their final trustee board meeting, ML, GA and DD are thanked for their contributions on the Board.

Date of next meeting: To be confirmed (Oct 2023)

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
None		