

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Tuesday 26th January 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
Isobel Lines (Student Trustee) - IL

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) - SW
Samina Fiaz (SU HR & Admin Coordinator, also Minute Secretary) – SF
Tim Hewes-Belton (Student Engagement Manager) – THB; for item 5 only
Jack Moore (Student Engagement Coordinator) – JM; for item 5 only

1. Attendance and Apologies

No apologies received.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising

SF had added the safeguarding policy to the staff induction checklist and had diarised an annual update for existing staff.

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

None declared.

5. Presentation from Student Engagement Team

THB and JM had been invited to the board meeting to present on work the student engagement team had been progressing and their upcoming plans. This included updates on the implementation of the governance review, societies, help and advice, volunteering, RAG, and academic representation.

THB and JM are thanked for the insightful presentation and then leave the meeting.

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 attended a pre-SUSS meeting with other SU's and the group had agreed on some questions to be asked at the SUSS AGM next month.
- 6.2 Some staff had been flexibly furloughed following internal discussions and it had been agreed that whilst the SU would try to make cost savings where it could, that continuing to provide a service to students was its priority and the furlough scheme would only be used where appropriate. The Student Engagement Team had a busy semester ahead and while sports were not going ahead the Sport team had been assisting the Student Engagement Team. Whilst this was currently the best approach to take, it was an additional task for department managers to induct staff into the areas covered in their temporary roles. The use of the furlough scheme would continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- 6.3 The tender process for the auditors had been progressing well with 5 companies interested in tendering, including the existing auditors.
- 6.4 Preparations for the budget submission were under way. The SU will be requesting more than last year's block grant (a 13% increase) to account for an expected loss of commercial income, whilst efforts were included in the budget to save costs wherever possible, resulting in very tight departmental budgets. The management are aware that the sector faces a very challenging time financially, as does the University and so this uplift may not be possible. If not, discussions will be needed about any effect this might have on the capabilities and priorities of the organisation.
- 6.5 The SU was monitoring staff morale, particularly now with staff working from home again and the challenges that can bring for some staff. All staff were currently working from home unless it was necessary for them to come to the office for specific tasks or personal welfare reasons.
- 6.6 The SU was preparing for the virtual annual All Student Meeting next month and discussions were under way as to how best to engage students with this.
- 6.7 The SU's strategic plan expires in July 2021 and SW has been giving a lot of thought to this, as well as having conversations with a few of the Trustees. SW outlined her concerns about formulating a new longer-term plan at this time due to the uncertainties and challenges that the pandemic continues to bring. The University is in the process of reviewing its priorities and it is not clear how students and services will emerge from the crisis and it is key that effective and meaningful consultation with members and SU staff takes place prior to agreeing a plan. Many SUs utilise external companies to conduct comprehensive research as part of the planning process. SW suggested that, rather than implementing poor strategy in haste, the SU develops a 'bridging' annual plan for 2021/22 whilst the world returns to some form of normality. The board discussed this further and agreed that an annual plan was sensible, with good rationale in the current climate. It was agreed that a review can still be conducted to remove any objectives from the 2016-21 plan that were no longer relevant or which had become part and parcel of the SU's daily operations (rather than a specific need to address, as it may have been in 2016).

- 6.8 The board discussed the fact that the University's Senior Pro Vice Chancellor Students was leaving and that the SU's relationship with the University would require attention during the temporary transition period, not least building a new relationship with the new Deputy Pro Vice Chancellor. The responsibilities of the Senior PVC (Students) was not being handed over wholesale to one individual but rather delegated to a number of senior managers, meaning the Officers and SMT of the SU would have several ports of call under the interim arrangements. The board discussed potential ways to maintain and review (where it was felt necessary) the relationship with the University and the potential benefits of agreeing 'values and principles' of engagement, including the perceived benefit of attending certain committees. It was also suggested that the SU could draw up a 'map of engagement' to support officers and staff through this interim period. MP agreed to give this further thought and continue the discussion via email.
- Action:** MP to discuss further with the Executive Committee and communicate further thoughts to the Board members via email.
- 6.9 The SU continued to engage nationally with SU's via various webinars and conferences to ensure WSU's voice is heard within national communities of practices and to voice opinions on current topics. The Officers had been excelling at this and in making sure Worcester was 'on the map' when it came to debating issues, including accommodation, student hardship, and academic integrity. SW wanted the Board to know that she was incredibly proud of them.
- 6.10 Progress by the SU's new internal EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) Working Group had been delayed due to other genuine priorities, which was regrettable but work to date included agreeing the terms of reference and drafting an equal opportunities policy and Equality Impact Assessment template for the SU (for the group to review). The group were due to convene next month, with EDI work very much at the heart of the SU's ongoing plans. The networks had been fundamental and would continue to be so for the SU's goals for improving equality, diversity and inclusion. The SU was keen to develop initiatives for disabled students in sport. The parents, mature students and carers network had been very active and the SU was learning much more about this cohort of students. The SU continued to be allies of the LGBTQ+ community which was also going from strength to strength. The SU continued to push the University to progress their own EDI agenda and workstream.

7. Monthly Management Accounts – October 2020

- 7.1 The SU was controlling costs well as revenue was still down. Savings continued to be made via the Job Retention Scheme as a result of some staff being furloughed. The Finance and Commercial manager had been researching new potential revenue streams and the Venue and Events Manager was making plans in readiness for when the Hangar could open.
- The Board also discussed opportunities to develop sponsorships via external sources and the need to explore new income streams, including for non-commercial activities. IL suggested a contact she was able to pass on to the SU who may be interested in supporting events.

Action: IL to pass details to SW of potential contact

8. Strategic Plan 2016-21 – Progress update

SW outlined the key developments from the current plan, which included:

- 8.1 The SU was doing well in online engagement, credit to the marketing team. The Officers have also done a very good job in developing new ways of engaging students online. The growth of the networks has been bigger than anticipated albeit there have been challenges for some of the committees and groups, such as the International Students Network, in the current climate.
- 8.2 A lot of work had been done on raising the profile of the Advice Service which appeared to be working, with more students using the service in recent months.
- 8.3 The SU had responded well to the pandemic, adjusting services, with mainly very positive feedback from students. Engagement with students continued to be pleasing considering the circumstances.
- 8.4 The Ideas Forum had been progressing well albeit it was not yet a tool that was well-known amongst the student body. With time and ongoing promotion, it is hoped that it would receive the engagement from students that initiatives such as #teamworc have achieved.
- 8.5 Good progress had been made in sustainability work thanks to the hard work of MP and staff involved in this area of work.
- 8.6 The SU had started to develop its' processes around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, with much work needed to develop and ensure best practice in all areas of the SU's operations.
- 8.7 Volunteering had been rebranded and time and effort would continue to be put in to develop this moving forward.
- 8.8 Areas coded as 'Red' were largely due to timing, as Semester 2 projects and events.

9. Draft Annual Impact Report

The impact report was nearly complete and is likely to be published in February. The board approved it in its current format ready for final touches before publishing.

10. Board Sub-committees

- 10.1 HS updated the board on key discussions from the HR subcommittee which included:
 - Probationary reviews to continue for new staff who had been furloughed and were now back at work.
 - The recruitment of the new Student Voice Assistant and potential start date.
 - Staff furlough plans.
 - The (NUS-sourced) Employee Engagement Survey to be rolled out in February.
 - Key discussions at the staff consultative forum.
- 10.2 MP updated the board on key discussions from the finance subcommittee which included:

- The continued impact of Covid-19 on finances and discussions around new initiatives for income, including different areas of sponsorship.
- Savings made via the Job Retention Scheme.
- Plans for the 2021/22 budget.
- The tender process for the auditors.

11. Officers' report

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

- Five policies have been approved at Welfare and Inclusion Council, which had been settling into its role well.
- The Chat service to support students who wanted to have a chat had gone well.
- Engagement with School reps and Course reps had been challenging but Repstival was going ahead to help maintain contact and communication.
- TeamWorc committee had met in November and had been split up into sports clubs and societies. Although TeamWorc had already agreed to withdraw from BUCS, it was announced in the new year that BUCS would be cancelled for the remainder of the year.
- A survey had been sent to students regarding how they felt Semester 1 had gone and how they felt the SU had performed, with some very good and constructive feedback having been received.
- The Officers were hopeful that the Sustainability allotment would still be going ahead and would remain in touch with the University's Director of Sustainability to move this forward.
- RAG donations had reached nearly £19K; a fantastic achievement. Men's rugby and Men's cricket raised nearly £10K of this via fundraising for Movember, which was an incredible achievement.
- HS and MP had worked very hard, following many meetings with University staff to secure a 'Safety Net' academic 'policy' from the University. MP had also been working very hard with the University on accommodation and rent issues and was pleased that the University were offering rent rebates to those who are eligible in University accommodation.
- All resources had been made available online for partner colleges in terms of course rep training. The resources had been tailored so they were specific to partner colleges. HS had been assisting one college in particular with some course issues.
- The Officers had been helping students with mitigating circumstances and extensions where they had faced any issues as a result of Covid test results, the impact of the pandemic in general and also those who were parents and carers and were facing any additional challenges, such as with home schooling.
- HS would be meeting with the former Universities Minister, Chris Skidmore, next week to discuss potential legislation to ban 'essay mills'. This follows his collaboration with NUS and another SU on this issue. This would represent an important development for the sector, addressing unscrupulous companies, and helping to protect students from committing academic misconduct.
- TM had been working with other SU staff to prepare approximately 170 boxes for students who were parents or carers to help them cope during lockdown. The

boxes contained treats and activities for the children as well as information leaflets for students on the support available to them.

- TM was designing a pen pal initiative to pair up students who may be experiencing loneliness, particularly first year students who had started their university experience during the pandemic and not been able to make many friends. DA is a member of the mature students' network and stated that the interaction with other students has been highly beneficial during the pandemic in terms of sharing experiences and supporting one another.

12. Executive Committee minutes

An update from the last meeting included:

- Approval of an Archery Society.
- Discussions on how to implement ideas from the Ideas forum and best ways to communicate back to the student body on progress.
- Discussions on issues related to Covid including, the travel window (prior to the Christmas break) and accommodation issues.

13. Student Council Summary

The annual accounts were approved, as well as the officer reports. There were updates from the 3 sub councils (Welfare and Inclusion, Education, and TeamWorc) and a policy motion was approved for academic societies to be able to vote in education council.

A report provided an update on progress with the Network to date and their priorities and plans for the year ahead. Council, also discussed Covid testing, the travel window, as well as how online teaching and assessments were going.

14. Board of Governors summary

An update was given on discussions at the last Board of Governors meeting.

Discussions included some of the challenges currently facing the University as a result of the pandemic and potential plans to overcome these.

[Commercial in confidence].

15. Any Other Business

None

Date of next meeting: 22nd March 2021

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
JM to send the Student Engagement Team presentation to SF to forward on to the board.	JM	ASAP

MP to discuss mapping /reviewing relationship with University further with the Executive Committee and communicate further thoughts to the Board members via email	MP	ASAP
IL to pass details to SW of potential contact re sponsorship opportunities	IL	ASAP

DRAFT