



TRUSTEE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Minutes for the Twenty-fifth Trustee Council meeting held on Tuesday the 29th of August in The Olive Garnett Building, Froebel College.

Present Jack De France (JdF), ChuChu Nwagu (CN), Joanna Briggs (JB), Ian Robinson (IR), Tessa Willy (TW), David Martin (DM), Guy Drury (GD).

In Attendance Matt Wall (MW), Kennedy Small (KS).

1: Apologies

2: Minutes: Minutes from the last Trustee Meeting were approved by those present.

3: Matters Arising:

Action Point - Matt to circulate the Trustee Meeting dates to Joanna, Chuchu and Guy.

Matt wants to wait for the new staff to be appointed before we put together an Activities Strategy.

The Little Feedback, Big Results meeting drew up 20 action points for the next academic year. Thanks to Matt and the Student Voice Team for this.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

Sabbatical Officer Initial Plans for the Year

Jack De France

JB – Two main objectives for the year. To implement “SOUL” Days which stands for Skills of Understanding Life. Jo feels that students need an education on what’s outside of University as well as their studies when they’re here. Eg: Budgeting in September and Health in January.

The second objective is to focus on the attainment gap, in particular with BAME students in the hope later on we’ll be able to look at other gaps. Not sure how to quantify the data on this so looking into the strategic plan with the view of implementing it in that. The attainment gap is based on statistic that show white males are typically obtaining first and 2:1 degrees, whereas black males are more likely to

achieve 2:2's and third class degrees. We want to develop an understanding of why this is and find a way to close the gap between the races.

TW: Are you just focussing on the overall degree classification or are you looking at year on year?

JB: It will be a constant review to make sure that things don't fall apart after Jo leaves. 80% of white students are obtaining 1st and 2:1 degrees, whereas it's only 50% of black students achieving the same.

TW: Retention is also an issue among BAME students?

JdF: Yes, along with satisfaction.

CN: Keen to continue with the campaigns that were put in place by George during his time in the role. ChuChu feels it's important to provide short, snappy campaigns for students to keep them engaged and interested. He is keen to record why we're implementing these campaigns and what we hope to get at the end of it so there's ways to measure its success.

Three main objectives as well as the campaigns. The "Tell Us Once" Policy which was initially introduced by the Sussex Police. It's a way in which you can inform one institution if there is a death in your family and they will make sure that other parties are aware so it's not your responsibility to tell everyone. Disclosure and reporting system. One statement can be taken and circulated confidentially throughout the University. The second is Graduation costs and whether the University could do anything around subsidising these costs. Eleanor Merrick, the Director of Alumni, Development and Careers, is also keen for this to happen so the wheels are in motion.

The third focus is on the International Guarantor scheme. International students are having to pay up to six month's rent up front. ChuChu is looking to see if there anything the Uni can do to support them on this. Briefly discussed giving International students priority accommodation on campus as a way to get round this.

JdF: Focussing on off campus students. Last year was the Student Mentor Programme which this year we've renamed as the ROC Scheme (Reps for Off Campus). These Reps will be there from day one and provide first years with a friendly face and also show them around. Bridge the divide.

Student Union Council – set up committees underneath elected officers to broaden the range of students that we can connect with.

Leadership development skills, how students within leadership roles can transfer the skills they've learnt into job roles etc.

Chief Executive Update

Matt Wall

Really busy Summer with challenging developments happening all at once.

10 positions advertised in the sector in order to recruit new candidates and many thanks to those involved in this as it's taken a lot of time. Major redevelopment of our office space. Around £140k spent on revamping this kindly provided by the SU.

More development in the Hive to make it more successful in the future. It's never really returned much money but Matt would like to think of it as a benefit to campus life in

general, as well as serving the local community. The original plan was to develop Digby square into a profitable enterprise to support the non-commercial side of Growhampton, but Matt's been doing a lot of work with the NUS purchasing consortium, one of the biggest in the UK. One of the challenges of not buying into this earlier was that you had to buy everything from them but Matt's challenged NUS's ethical status on it so they fit in with ours. Likelihood is a 10-15% saving on costed goods. We also have pushed forward a price increase for the first time in 3 years.

Membership services has had a busy summer. We've recruited a Deputy Chief Exec Membership Services Manager and this role, once known as the Membership services manager will be changing to suit our growing needs.

A lot of work has been done on building our advice department up, which is still only one member of staff at the moment but there's a lot of good work going into this which will hopefully result in a higher footfall.

Significant University investment in the Bar and re-secured money for the Fresher's Village again this year which is positive.

Catering agreement is up in January and the University has secured Elior as the new catering company. Matt's working about putting a clause in their contract that they must buy all alcohol sales from us and that potentially we can raise that tariff to sell that product to them and make some money through the purchasing consortium.

Appointed an Events Coordinator, hoping to diversify our events by doing this. The nightclub events run themselves but we need more innovative things and our demographic requires more.

Doing some work with the Uni around sexual harassment which is not a problem at Roehampton and our events are run in a very safe way but we have these people in place to ensure student safety going forward.

Growhampton – Uni have not given us assurance on funding this year. We are running at a bare minimum and as a result have to wait for recruitment in that area. We do have a position live at the moment but on the basis that we're expecting funding to come through for this any day.

DM: Worried about the funding coming through as we know the Uni are trying to cut costs and they've given us a large block grant already so would they fund more from this?

JdF: When we asked for the block grant we did say to the Uni to expect another funding proposal from us for Growhampton.

MW: Met with the VC and he said the Uni would always support this venture as it's a great USP for the Uni but he just wants to see a reduction in costs and part of this is linked to the Hive. Headroom of £38k, which is the same as we asked for last year in order to keep a good staffing level to enable projects to get off the ground and bring income. Doesn't foresee this being a problem. Reviewing the contract for the staff member as and when. Trying to be as fair as we can. Think the Uni were waiting on student numbers which are looking good so this should work in our favour.

IR: What's the expectation that the £38k might stop at the end of the year? Are they looking at you to make it more self-contained?

MW: Still too early in the project to tell. Long term, it will always need staffing.

IR: Better to do this over a three year period as then we could reduce the £38k and have longer term funding.

MW: It used to be £65k so there has already been a reduction. Hoping long term picture is sustainable. Aware that there may be some fear around this but being fairly risk adverse in the forecast.

Comms has had a great period. Money coming in from advertising through freshers' fair etc but this is the first year we've had no income from Endsleigh insurance as they are tending to throw money at Russell group Universities.

IR: Endsleigh do fund particular projects where they can see a market to other insurance schemes.

MW: They all look at return in investment and maybe we're not giving them that return, although they do cover the halls of accommodation. We do use Bam but they are in arrears with us. We're not in a terrible place but it is useful. NUS sales are also a good source of income.

Working the budget hard to ensure that the new Reception is the best it can be and will therefore generate footfall and income for us as an SU.

GD: It's beneficial that you don't have to rent the space from the Uni for a prolonged period of time which is encouraging.

MW: It's been a great outcome considering we've seen an increase in our block grant this year too so to have the additional funding for this project is very encouraging. There's a level of trust.

A few positions that we're developing the strategies for but a good period of recruitment and it will see less temporary staff and more members who are focussed on their vocation. Knowledge and expertise going forward.

DM: Biggest concern is these recent appointments and the budget for next year. What's the bottom line?

MW: Our staff costs go up to around £550k which is around the block grant level and Matt anticipates a turnover of £1.2-£1.3 million so this shouldn't be an issue.

DM: Wanted Matt to know that where the Union went wrong in the past was overstaffing. It's a very small Union compared to others and this is a worry.

GD: What process do we have for delegating authority in terms of expenditure in these posts?

MW: Block grant proposal committed to funding these positions and to an extent we're tied by this proposal.

JdF: Also only 4 of these roles are completely new and the other positions used to be interns with other roles being reshaped. Looks like we've got a whole new tender but it's actually just a remodel.

GD: Clear plan of salaries for now and the future is needed.

IR: There's still a gap in what we're planning on spending money on in the block grant proposal and what it's actually going on and this needs to be clearer moving forward. Salary increases with the grant?

MW: Budgeted for the following year. The figures we're presenting are real time. There's a goodwill instead of them being written.

JdF: Not been agreed in the long term.

IR: Could you produce something for us that does bridge the gap between where we are now with salaries and the grant compared to next year's salary forecast and block grant budget. We need to formally agree on this from a Governance point of view.

MW: £25k under budget for labour spend as our projection for the rest of the year if everyone stays in post.

GD: Do we have anything regarding non-personal expenditure?

MW: The figure is around £5000 but anything around this we can bring this to the Trustee Board and firm it up.

A Review of Internal and External Benchmarking

Matt Wall

MW: No internal benchmarking as to where we were going, what our students thought of us and whether our ventures were successful. “How’s RSU for You” survey was rolled out and 450 students completed it which gave us an idea of benchmarking. 81.94% of students are satisfied with the SU and if people are interested in further detail Matt can send that on. 83.61% of students feel we contribute positively to their experience. Wide variety of students filled out the survey with 8.5% of those that completed it saying they never visited us. 55% visit us once or more a week. Concerns – career after Uni. Jack’s leading skills sessions on this as well as focussing on transferrable skills students attain from Uni. 20% of students feel they’ve got poor mental health/wellbeing and nearly 5% of students don’t know what the RSU is or does. Interesting to see that new ideas are featuring highly such as the de-stress operations.

Interesting figures for next year but shows that we’re on a good road with positive responses. Interesting to look at the demographic profile of it.

NSS survey, joint 29th in the country and this means we’ve gone up in satisfaction compared to other Unions.

Part of why the Uni is keen to invest in us is that we’re one of the top performing aspects of the University.

We have to tackle the experience on different courses as there is a massive divide there. 20% difference between the most satisfied department and the least satisfied. Dance have gone from the top of satisfaction to the least.

Useful to have this historical data in future years.

IR: Is this a surprise to you and how are you then going to tackle these departments that aren’t satisfied? Interested to see where this question 26 in the survey takes you and whether you’re going to follow or just use as a benchmark.

MW: there’s no reason why we couldn’t be up there with UWL who have the top SU in the country. We’re in a difficult place though as what the Uni want us to deliver is not the same as what the NSS does and it’s about balancing the two and the Uni are resourcing us in areas that don’t fall in line with that question. It’s a compromise. We are growing resource in that department though going from 1 member of staff to 3.

JB: Programme rep training, some are fully involved others not so much, within this training teaching them to engage with their students to be that middleman. Better communication between the two. Hopefully reflected in next survey.

HM: See what students’ interests are in order to put a strategic plan in place and teach the reps accordingly. What is an academic interest? Ambiguous question.

MW: Two new members of staff to look at this and how we build an academic community through things such as volunteering and how do we tailor these opportunities to include academic interest. Key focus for Membership Services Manager. What might Trustees expect going forward.

IR: Got to decide whether you chase it as a strategic initiative.

GD: How much influence you have over things. There's a challenge for SU's as the power for the course rep system lies with you. Be cautious about this question.

IR: forge better relationships with the heads of Department and academic staff to create that change.

JB: Staff are keen on improving this. Feel it's a lack of communication and are looking for students to sit on panels to see how things are done.

IR: Motivated reps mean better outcomes.

JdF: How we communicate what we're doing to students and that certain things relate to us as an SU. Visible.

GD: This question 26 is not about how good you are but how hard you try, however students won't read it like that. It's a very difficult question and Guy's always been sceptical about the value of NSS based on these ambiguous questions. Challenge for Matt and Jack, why is a career after University the SU's responsibility?

MW: Not our responsibility but we can play a role in this. We should always be aware of our student needs and goals.

GD: There's a difference in what a SU can do and what it can lobby to achieve. Be realistic about this. Things that make a tangible impact. Important to make the distinction.

JfD: It's more about getting the Uni to focus on these things and improve their employability.

IR: Effectively there's a business opportunity by offering employability through the SU so a business case can be drawn up. On the back of the skills training we could develop an employment opportunity that the Uni recognises.

HM: Make a case to the Uni about the need for the SU's services

MW: There is some evidence to suggest that those who get involved in extracurricular activities are more employable as a result.

Timeline for Strategic Work – Papers attached

Matt Wall

MW: Request for agenda items for the next few meetings as well as give transparency to the board about what's coming up.

HM: Update on new catering contract?

JdF: Update from Union Council, contact and accountability between the two.

IR: What's the mechanism for reporting policy? What's the policy around external speakers? Is there a reporting mechanism to the board?

MW: Both we and the Uni have an external speaker's policy but Matt's more than happy to bring this to the Trustee meeting. If an external speaker poses a risk then

this will get reported to the Uni and they will make an initial risk assessment on this. We've flagged external speakers and the Uni have come back to us and said they're fine so ultimately they decide.

IR: Trustees have to make a separate decision regardless of what the Uni decides. It's that decision in terms of risk that is reported to the board.

GD: Important that there are refusals that are reported.

IR: Useful at the end of the year to collect the data from this as it covers our duty.

HM: Uni compliance with Prevent?

MW: We meet with the Uni a lot around Prevent as we're better off at the table with these discussions.

CN: How often is the policy reviewed?

MW: Endlessly maintained as it's reviewed whenever we have an external speaker.

Action Point - Bring forward an audit on where we are on this yearly.

GD: Could the operating plan come any sooner than September?

MW: June is too early for this but it could all be ready to be signed off by September. It will be good to bring it forward and get the Sabbs fully involved. The aim was to have a draft by this meeting and for it to be pulled apart by the Trustees during the meeting.

Management Accounts

Matt Wall

Audit in coming weeks but we're in a very strong position. Guy you were spot on when you said that we need to make sure that RAG is separate from our charitable activities.

Ahead of where we are last year in terms of overall surplus. Tough year as new academic timetable has compromised our trading weeks and affected us. Events team and catering have adjusted well though.

Grant income up last year as well as trading income – encouraging.

There are some discrepancies but that's to do with Matt and Ken's adjustment in terms of separating income and changing titles of things. EG: clothing gone into media sales.

Entertainments been strong and again we've taken a hit on certain areas.

Staff costs have been good, coming in under budget. Bottom line, we're where we thought we'd be.

IR: Clothing sells down on budget. How are we going to make this up and is it worth carrying on?

MW: It's been done badly this year, we've extended the range online which only gives us 10% profit whereas in house our sales would generate a 50-60% profit per item. Going forward delivering more products in house and carrying a bigger range of stock.

IR: Making up lost ground?

MW: No can't see us making this up.

DM: Useful to have last year's figures on this.

IR: Such a small surplus that it's a worry.

MW: Level of depreciation on the café is crippling in the short term.

Turnover percentage against staff costs should be around 50% and this is what it is going forward. A figure that's used across the sector. Maybe we're affected by this by not picking up pension contributions so actually the burden is higher because the pension contributions is outside of that. Might need some extra work around this. There is a lot more money to come in from the Uni.

TW: When's it expected?

MW: Before the audit. A lot of things happen towards the end of the year that need to be invoiced and aren't necessarily factored into the budget in time.

Matt doesn't see there being any major concerns but will go back to Ken on certain projections that can't be right looking at the budget.

Final thing to reflect on is the Hive's income. Looking to bring in £30k but this was ambitious. Where we've come unstuck is our cost of goods and the work that we're doing to develop the purchasing consortium will help this.

Temporary staff has also been an issue and the manager has been on several courses in order to give him a better understanding of profit and how to achieve this.

DM: It's essential for the Manager to know the value of his products and how to produce the most income surrounding this.

MW: We have a couple of moral dilemmas with the Hive as the Feel Good Bakery sandwiches are our best seller but we don't actually make a profit on these, however, they do feed a child in a deprived area so it's a moral dilemma.

GD: Do we make a loss on these sandwiches? Does it challenge our charitable objectives?

MW: No.

DM: What happened to the catering vans?

MW: Uni having the appropriate power in the places that we want to trade. More often it loses us money. There was the provision a year ago for the van to trade at a high volume but this isn't the case now and we only use it for certain occasions that will guarantee us money instead of using it everyday.

DM: There's too many fluctuations that look like someone is mis-budgeting, maybe it's just a miscommunication. Don't want these figures going to the University as they are.

IR: If you're going for a 61% GP then the budget should follow through. The cost of the purchases should be more competitive but it would be useful to see the budget for the Hive in more detail.

MW: Kennedy will take a lead on this as well as the new member of staff in finance administration.

A.O.B

IR: What you've achieved in the last 12 months is remarkable. Feels like we're on the cusp of something that is bigger and better and will really benefit students immensely. Fantastic result.

JdF: Hameed's last meeting as a Union Council Officer on the Trustee Board but we're recruiting a post graduate student trustee so it might not be his last meeting overall.

University management keen to meet the Trustee Board.

GD: Companies house appointment?

MW: Done before the audit.

Date of Next Meeting – 30th of November 2017

Kate Griffiths
Secretary
November 2017