



TRUSTEE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Minutes for the Twenty-second Trustee Council meeting held on Wednesday the 14th of December, 2016 in The Olive Garnett Building, Froebel College.

Present Jack De France, George Cole, Marie Johansen, Ian Robinson, Tessa Willy, Andy Smith, Hameed Mozaffari

In Attendance Matt Wall, Kate Griffiths, Kennedy Small

1: Apologies David Martin, Brian Stewart

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

3: Matters Arising:

The Trustee Panel welcomes two new members, Ian Robinson, who was Chief Executive at Bath Students' Union for 20 years and since retiring is now involved with a number of other SU's as well as various charities and Hameed Mozaffari the Part Time Officer elected trustee, who is our current Postgraduate Part Time Elected Officer.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

4: Chief Executive Update
Matt Wall

It's been an exceptionally busy first term and Matt is pleased to see that all staff are on board with the strategic plan which seems to have been taken on very organically.

The building where the current Trustee meeting is being held - Olive Garnett – has been refurbished and now provides 6 new bookable rooms that the students have access to as well as us.

Matt would like to credit Jack for pushing the off-campus rep initiative, the purpose of which is to engage more students through student-lead operations. It was a pilot scheme and it needs reviewing but we've managed to reach 220 students who we might not have been in touch with before.

Student Union Council (SUC) is operating successfully and the format seems to be really working well.

The Programme Rep scheme continues to go from strength to strength with quality face to face training for all new and continuing reps.

There have been some on-going campaigns throughout the year which we have added our support to, including challenging the on-campus accommodation costs as well as lobbying the University to provide more laundry facilities on campus. The new accommodation building, Elm Grove, was built without a laundry, even though we were promised by the University that it would include these facilities. The NUS National Demo back in November was a great day and there was a good turnout of Roehampton Students for it so that was encouraging.

The BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) Conference was a highlight and it was hoped that this would help aid the challenging attainment gap that we have within these student demographics.

Freshers Week this year was able to become much larger due to the £11,000 we received from the University. However, this was as a compensation for the fact that our plans for a temporary structure to house the Students' Union and give us more space were shelved for the foreseeable future. We were also conscious that with the new accommodation on Digby, there would be more students on campus so we'd need to make our events larger and more inclusive to accommodate them. We are also one of the first Student Unions in the country to hire out an entire theme park – in this case Thorpe Park – for our students as part of the Fresher's week programme.

Ian asked if we'd received any complaints surrounding the fresher's week programme and Matt noted that there were significantly less than last year which was encouraging.

The events have been strong and well attending, but perhaps not as well attended as we first anticipated with the additional 400 students on campus. Monte Hall, where we hold our weekly Friday night event called The Bop, was given a revamp over the Summer and a new sound system was put in place to hopefully provide more of a club atmosphere.

We have also piloted a number of non-alcohol driven events with mixed success. They're in demand but we just need to pitch these right in order to get the most involvement.

Tess asked what events we have put on in relation to this and Matt mentioned the puppy room that we had in May as a de-stress initiative for the students around exam time. We brought in a charity who expose puppies to social environments to get them accustomed to human contact before they are given homes.

The ski trip was less successful this year with only 13 people going compared to double that last year. However, the Edinburgh trip that we arranged for the beginning of December was more successful with student feedback being that they enjoyed it.

We have also put on a couple of Chill-a-thons which are non-alcohol driven and allow student to relax with food and hot and cold drinks provided. We also put on films for them to watch, all taking place in Monte Hall.

We are planning to review all these events over the Christmas period and will focus on the exam period in January with more de-stress events planned including another puppy room.

We've had a huge increase in Society development with the Olive Garnett building being instrumental in this. 20 new societies have been formed and it's now about keeping the retention of the others.

1,100 students signed up to join societies at the Fresher's Fair which we were unprepared for as it far exceeded our target.

We have had completely student led committees set up surrounding volunteering and RAG to help boost these two areas and we currently have 136 volunteers signed up to our database.

Action Point – Bring Volunteer Strategy to next Trustee Meeting

Our Communications development has been brilliant, we now have a team who are professional and driven and we are able to deliver content more effectively. We have a monthly publication named RSU Scoop and a termly magazine, the content of which is all provided and written by students.

We are £7,000 above the end of year budget and we also have new agreements with companies such as Uber, who give us £1,000 to advertise their services. NUS Extra sales are strong and we receive £4 from every card we sell so this is encouraging. Last week we had a company called American Eagle in to promote themselves and give out free jeans to students. They gave out nearly 1,000 pairs and there was a queue from when they opened at 10am to when they closed at 6pm.

Ian asked if we go through agencies to book these commercial ventures and Matt answered that it mostly goes through him. Ian then suggested that there are other avenues, such as NUS Media, that we could explore so it doesn't all fall on Matt to organise.

Growhampton now has a committee and it's looking so popular that there are plans to set up another one. The Hive has also posted encouraging figures for the first term with a 15% increase in turnover from the last year and the team will also be looking at prices over the Christmas period. We have to make sure that we are balancing our Gross Profit with our ethical stance so neither is sacrificed in favour of the other.

We've been given £15,000 to employ 8 part-time interns to work alongside our team and assist in the areas where we need more hands.

We are launching a new app around holiday time and appraisals etc so hopefully this can work more effectively and there is a record of this data.

The University catering contract is up next year so this will be reviewed in the coming months. In student opinion, the Hive is the most popular food outlet on campus and there will need to be conversations with the University surrounding either getting a bigger block grant or taking control of more commercial space.

Action Point – Report back on these developments at the Trustee Meeting in February.

Ian mentioned that this is a rare opportunity as contracts are lengthy so we need to capitalise on the fact that this one is coming to an end and really make it work to our advantage.

Matt noted that we miss a lot of footfall by being tucked away on the top floor and there have been plans to develop what is now the Student Life Office, currently located on the floor beneath our offices, into the new reception area. These plans have continued to be pushed back by the University but there is a meeting planned for January with the idea to start work on this in the Easter holidays.

Ian noted that he thought we had drastically undersold the mentor scheme that we've got in place and that it has huge benefits for the University too. Instead of just targeting students who live off campus or have little engagement with the RSU, we should be targeting all students.

Jack mentioned that he is writing a report on how the first term has been and noted that the term "Student Mentor" was found to have put people off as they associated it with more academic issues rather than just being someone there to support them in all areas.

5: Operating Plan

Matt Wall

We are looking at next year's operating plan already and Matt welcomes any feedback at this time as we look more long term at this.

The Trustees were given a handout in the meeting that outlined our proposed plans for the future.

Andy asked who would view this document and Matt answered that it would be available on our website, making sure to be careful in how we document the more sensitive parts of the plans.

Jack noted that he has found it very useful over his first term in office as it brings him back to focus and Matt added that the strategy appears in every room in our building as well as the Olive Garnett rooms so it's completely accessible.

Ian wanted to know how we as outsiders were able to measure whether or not the things we had set out to achieve had been achieved and that this was something to think about but overall it's a really strong and comprehensive document.

6: Accounts Update

Kennedy Small

With Ken being very unwell over the last couple of months the audit that was planned for December has now been pushed back to the 23rd of January. This doesn't affect the submission of our accounts in May, but we've always liked to get the audit in as early as possible.

During the academic year 2015/16 we've seen a turnover increase of £20,638 from the last academic year and our block grant has also increased by £10,000 to £377,000. We had proposed that the University give us a lump sum to cover all our projects throughout the year but they insist on giving us pots of money throughout the year instead.

Our costs are higher than normal due to staffing increases and we've posted a surplus of £8,776 which is significantly down on last year but this is explained by the aforementioned staffing increases.

We project a £210,000 profit from the Hive cafe but there is an ongoing issue with VAT and whether we allocate this to outside sources or not. Ken welcomed any ideas surrounding this and it was suggested that we would effectively be subsidising outside companies if we charged VAT across the board.

Matt had the idea of building additional on-campus discounts to students with the NUS extra cards as a means of both encouraging them to buy one and then to use the services we run on campus.

It was suggested that we trial this and survey the audience for a week to see if there's anything that can be garnered from this.

Those Trustees gathered noted that this was more David's area of expertise so a meeting with him should be set up to discuss this further.

We received £15,000 from the Wandsworth Green Fund and the money from this has gone towards mobile vehicles that we can take round to the local schools and communities spreading the message about sustainable living. We haven't done as many school visits as we would've liked this term but there are some visits scheduled for January and February so hopefully this will take off in the new year. Any profits from the mobile Hive would also go back into the social enterprise.

Tess asked if we had links to the schools that take our students on for placement as that would forge a good link and unfortunately Matt said that this was something we had yet to establish.

We have raised £11,540 through charitable contributions and we have 3 chosen charities that we fundraise for throughout the year.

- Regenerate – A charity founded by our Trustee Andy Smith, who operate in the local area and who work with the youths on the estate to give them job opportunities and a step on the employment ladder. The Hive cafe also sells the sandwiches made by the Feel Good Bakery, some employees of which are ex-offenders, and each sandwich we sell gives a hot meal to a child in Romania and Kenya in their feeding programmes. Regenerate have received £3,045 from the money raised.
- Centrepoint – A charity that helps young homeless people aged between 16 and 25 and provides them with shelter. We have given them £3,384 from what we have raised.
- React – A charity that helps children with life-limiting illnesses and enables them to get equipment that will make their lives as easy as possible. We have given React £3,003 of the money raised.

Ian asked if management accounts come through to this meeting as he would be interested to see these and Ken responded that due to him being off for medical reasons these had not been completed yet but normally they are brought to the meeting by now.

Ian also asked if the finances are scrutinised by a sub-committee with more expertise in this area and although it was noted that there is yet to be a specific

committee set up for this, Matt, Ken and senior University staff do meet regularly, with the papers from these meetings brought to the Trustee Board.

It was noted that at the end of the day, the accountability lies with the Board of Trustees and we need to make sure that everything is in order as a duty of care to the students.

Matt mentioned that we need to give Ken more resources in order to assist Ken producing up to date accounts.

Action Point – Bring audited accounts to the next meeting

7: Block Grant Proposal

Matt Wall

Matt noted that the papers tabled at the meeting were a red-draft of the ones from last year and that he would look to Ian to help shape this for the next year.

He also wanted opinions of which route we go down, ie: asking for more Block Grant funding or taking on more commercial responsibilities.

George asked why this proposal didn't work last year and Matt answered that it was due to the University nit picking the figure. It becomes dangerous as we are then constantly chasing pots of money instead of focussing on what's important and what we need.

There needs to be a stronger presence of trust with the University. Years ago, we weren't making any money and we costing the University money to fund us. We are now in a much stronger position and they need to recognise that we are an important commodity.

Matt has highlighted areas of concern and these include:

- Withdrawal rates
- Increased engagement/building pride amongst students
- Employability/skills benefit

We now have the ability to gain membership data and with this we are able to benchmark ourselves. We are currently awaiting the data for the year 2015/16 but we know that we offer really good value for money in comparison to other HEI's. As noted on the graph tabled in the meeting we are currently showing that we provide £42 per student, with this figure coming just from the money from the block grant. We haven't worked out the cost per head with all the other money added in but this often fluctuates so it's not a reliable figure.

Matt apologised as this data was dropped on the Trustees at the last minute but he welcomed any feedback from this.

It was felt that the long term plan for the Block Grant was more of a discussion piece and a decision was made to sit down with the trustees to discuss this further.

Action Point – Jack and Matt to sit down with the Trustees outside of this meeting to go through this with them.

8: Elections Plan

Iain Pullar

The outline of these elections will be similar to last year's elections. We will still be using an online platform, but it will be different from the one used last year as this new platform fits in to the same one we use for our website and will be the same one used for the Top-Up elections in October. There is also a change to the length of time given for nominations. Nominations will now open from 16th of January and students will have until the 10th of March to nominate themselves for various roles. We know there's evidence to support this longer nomination period from the amount of students we had running last year.

The new role descriptions have gone to SUC for verification and it was felt that these were more in keeping with what is right for the SU moving forward.

We've tightened the rules up and made them clearer do there can be no discrepancy by anyone surrounding this.

We won't be pushing it out hard on the 16th as there will be plenty of time for students to nominate themselves and gain more information in order to make an informed decision but we will build the momentum around this in the coming months.

We aim to get 26% of our student body voting and we are encouraged by the amount of BME students who ran in the elections and won last year, maybe boosted by the BME conference that happened last academic year. We are hoping that the women's conference planned for 2017 will boost the number of females standing in the elections as this would more accurately represent our demographic.

Our main target is to get 1% of our student population standing in the elections which would equate to 85 students. We had 58 last year which was significantly up on the 32 the year before so this is an achievable target.

Matt wanted to thank Iain for all his hard work on this.

A.O.B

10: Items For the next Trustee Board Agenda

- Growhampton Funding Update
- Audited Accounts
- Update on Commercial Development/Block Grant

The temporary structure is still a sensitive issue and as a result of Brexit the WISH project that was started has been pushed further down the priority list.

The University also delayed us by giving us little bits (Olive Garnett) instead of one larger area.

Jack also wanted to mention that when Marie leaves the Trustee Board at the end of the next academic year, that our female representation on the board will be down to

one person and in order to represent our demographic accurately we should look to hire more female trustees.

He also suggested the Trustees meeting 45 minutes before each meeting to discuss the agenda off the record.

Date of Next Meeting - TBC

Kate Griffiths
Secretary
December 2016