

Trustee Board

Minutes

4th February 2016, 10:00am
Green Templeton College

Present:

Alex Bishop (AB) *Student Trustee*, Nick Cooper (NC) *VP Graduates*, Lucy Delaney (LD) *VP Women*, Tom Flynn (TF) *External Trustee*, Rebecca Howe (RH) *Chair*, James Hunt (JH) *External Trustee*, Harini Iyengar (HI) *External Trustee*, Richard Jackson (RJ) *External Trustee*, Archie Jones (AJ) *Student Trustee*, Catherine Jones (CJ) *VP Access and Academic Affairs*, Alasdair Lennon (AL) *VP Welfare and Equal Opportunities*, and Emily Silcock (ES) *VP Charities and Community*.

In Attendance:

Amelia Foster (AF) *CEO*, and Ami Gell (AG) *Democratic Support Officer*.

1. Apologies

Mishal Saeed (MS) *Student Trustee*.

2. Minutes from the previous meeting (Paper 1)

The minutes were approved by the Board.

3. Matter arising not covered elsewhere

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. CEO's Report (Paper 2 & Appendices 1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, & 4)

AF invited the Board to ask questions on her report, noting that the risk register and the strategy document required discussion, and the new SAS policies required approval. AF added that she needed one student trustee to be appointed to the Risk Committee and one to be appointed to the Finance Committee.

TF requested an update on the Communications Manager position. AF informed the Board that she is planning on using an agency for the two senior posts that need filling.

RJ asked for an update on accommodation. AF replied that the plan is still to move to 4 Worcester Street, and that a meeting with Estates is planned for the following week. RJ raised the issue that we have been in 2 Worcester Street for 5 years and have never had a lease. TF stated that this is very typical for student unions, although not ideal. AF informed the Board that the University have agreed to give us the facilities charge, however she will be insisting on assurances in writing that the cost difference between 2 and 4 Worcester Street will not be taken from OUSU's budget.

The Board discussed the pros and cons of the current website provider and debated various alternatives.

CJ asked if there will be an opportunity for sabbatical officers to shape the role description of the Membership Services Manager prior to its circulation around the Board. AF replied that this would be the case, and that she has been waiting on some information from the Proctors' office. TF suggested that if the role is focussed on advice and representation, he would suggest naming the position Student Voice Manager, rather than Membership Services Manager. Noted that if OUSU are looking to recruit within the sector, they need to be aware that anyone who sees the role Membership Services Manager would expect to have an activities coordinator, volunteering coordinator etc. reporting to them. AF noted that the role will not manage advice. TF strongly urged that the name Student Voice Manager is used for the role.

i) Approve Risk Register

AF informed the Board that this has already been approved the Risk Committee. **The Board approved the Risk Register.**

ii) Appoint Student Trustees to Risk Committee and Finance Committee

The Board appointed Alex Bishop to the Finance Committee.

The Board appointed Archie Jones to the Risk Committee.

iii) Strategy Reflections

JH raised the potential for OUSU to expand over time, particularly in relation to volunteering, and asked if the absence of this from the report meant that it was no longer planned. AF updated the Board on a very useful meeting with the Oxford Hub to discuss their relationship with OUSU, which provided a chance to be very honest about where the overlaps between the two lie. AF explained that the Hub offer volunteering opportunities on the projects that they run, but are not matching students with existing volunteering opportunities within Oxford. AF noted that OUSU were unable to offer this under previous memorandums of understanding with the Hub, but now have plans to meet and do a very honest mapping out of who does what, where there is overlap, and what both organisations will be doing in the future.

JH raised the potential for teaching evaluation to change. TF agreed that this is going to be massive. JF claimed that we need to stand ready for these changes in order to accommodate students' needs in Oxford. TF noted that they tweaked their own strategic plan following knowledge of the Teaching Excellence Framework. AF said it would be very helpful if people could send their thoughts over on this. TF suggested that student unions have the opportunity to embed themselves as the agents of improvement within education quality. CJ noted that this

has very much been in OUSU's consciousness, despite not being reflected in the paper, and updated the Board that she gave a speech at the University's Teaching Awards which was deliberately geared towards how OUSU can help them demonstrate what is excellent in teaching, and showing them that OUSU are the people who know what teaching excellence looks like.

TF stated that currently the objectives are a mixture of the organisation, with a little bit about students. TF stressed that objectives need to be less inward facing, and instead show how we are going to make students' lives better. AF explained that there have been a number of structural issues that have prevented OUSU from doing certain things for students, and all of these need solving, including the fact that students do not recognise what support OUSU provides. TF suggested that the plan opens with a statement on what OUSU does for students. The Board discussed the need to show how each element of the plan positively impacts on student members. TF suggested contacting Durham, who have previously struggled with their identity as a student union, and are currently doing an exercise of looking at what they can and cannot achieve as a student union. TF suggested using plenty of student consultation, explaining that when writing their plan, as Royal Holloway changed their values based on conversations with students.

Approval of Student Advice Service Policies

AF noted that the policies have been approved by the Risk Committee, and now just require formal approval from the Board. AF noted that OUSU is accredited with Advice UK, but that the aim is to move up a level and receive further accreditation, which means that there will be some changes, which will be circulated by the Risk Committee for approval at a later date.

The Board approved the Student Advice Service policies.

Other Updates

AF provided a budget update, confirming that the University need to make a 5% surplus, resulting in numerous cuts. AF noted that it was clear that OUSU would not get all the money they wanted, but that a request for the money that was already agreed, as well as a term-time only SAS advisor, and the additional member of senior management went ahead. AF reported that the University agreed the original amount of money, but not the extra requests. AF added that we should be able to find the money for a term-time advisor out of OUSU's existing budget.

AF circulated a poster for OUSU's planned club night, but noted that the date is not yet confirmed. TF raised the nature of club nights with students, and explained that however well the night is run, there will inevitably be complaints. LD explained that the key message for this is that it is a safer club night, with mechanisms to prioritise student safety, although recognising that no club night can be entirely safe. HI asked about the 'Good Night Out' scheme and if it is around in Oxford. AL updated the Board that he has been in discussions with them, and he is

not convinced that the training scheme is substantial enough right now, but noted that it is undergoing a review, so when this is completed, they will review it again.

HI asked what BeSMART is. AL explained that it is a programme that is run with Oxford University Security Services and the local substance abuse provider Turning Point that focuses on the use of cognitive enhancing drugs without prescription, which is a growing trend in Oxford. AL explained that OUSU are working to highlight the issues surrounding dependency on these drugs, and providing information on where students can turn to for help. AL recognised that there has been some concern that it is promoting the use of smart drugs, however clarified that this is not the case.

5. Report from the Sabbatical Officers, Campaigns and RAG (Paper 3)

RH flagged the student trustee by-election, informing the Board that nominations would open for the four vacant positions the following week. RH noted the concern of Board members that it will be difficult to get four people to run, but explained that when the positions were opened out to co-option, eleven students applied to get involved just for the term, suggesting that marketing it as good career experience made a positive difference. AJ informed the Board that he is a final year student, so this seemed like an appropriate time in his undergraduate career to do this, and perhaps the Board should put thought into when the term starts and finishes for trustees in relation to their studies. AJ suggested that if the term matched the academic year, this would open up the pool of potential applicants to all finalists. TF asked if there was a reason that co-option appeared to work better than elections. AF explained that following the Quinquennial Review, this is no longer up for discussion, as it was rejected at the time. RJ noted that getting trustees to run, and getting them to stay for the full duration of their term, has been a problem since OUSU has been operating in its current form since 2010. RJ also suggested that there has been confusion surrounding whether or not candidates are the same type of candidates as sabbatical officers from a political perspective, and is pleased to know it has been clarified that these candidates should not be running on a political manifesto. RJ claimed that the role of the student trustee needs to be sharpened up, so that candidates understand the role, and are aware of what exactly their role is at meetings. RJ explained that he has been convinced over the years that elections are the best way to find candidates and engage as many people as possible, and that he considered co-option as a fall back, which does not look as good as a cross-campus election.

AB noted that OUSU has a long-term struggle with getting their mission out to students, but recognised that on the other side of that, students do not understand the structure of who does what for OUSU within OUSU, or often that it even has a trustee board at all. AB pointed out that this is an obvious obstacle for those who would like a relatively low profile role in OUSU, and is a problem which needs to be addressed. NC echoed this point, and stated that if the proposed changes to the executive pass through council then the number of roles advertised will be considerably reduced, meaning there will be more scope to focus on the student trustee roles.

CJ gave an update to her report, informing the Board that the Alternative Prospectus website will be launched on February 15th, and that they have now been able to double the amount of schools which flyers are being sent out to from 3,000 to 6,000. TF flagged the potential of marketing income generation that is possible from the bespoke website for the Alternative Prospectus.

CJ informed the Board that at Education Committee the University endorsed the use of lecture recording, and have agreed to fund it from a central resource from the start of the next academic year. CJ noted that it will not be compulsory, but that any department can opt in for free, and all 600 OUSU course reps will be equipped to lobby their departments.

RJ suggested that the Board thank those campaigns who have reported, and encouraged those who have not to do so in the future. AF suggested that we send them a template outlining what they can report on. TF stated that he is not convinced that this body should be considering the reports of campaigns. RJ stated that it is currently a Bye-Law requirement for campaigns to report to both the Board and Council.

6. Governance (Paper 4 & Appendices 5 & 6)

NC explained that the changes to governance aim to simplify procedures, and acknowledged that while governance is not particularly student-facing or exciting, it does enable OUSU to do things that are. NC highlighted the main change, which is to the Executive, replacing the existing Part-Time Executive members with a representative from each campaign, as well as an undergraduate common room president and a graduate common room president. NC added that the changes have also been a good opportunity to shorten existing governance. RH clarified that the changes are not a tinkering with the rules, but a new start from scratch. RJ noted that it is always better to have rules and regulations in place, so we are in a better position to withstand challenges. TF stated that the new Bye-Laws do not say how the Returning Officer and Deputy Returning Officers are selected, and urged that they should not be students. AF explained that this has been discussed repeatedly, and it is not going to change. TF noted the complaints procedure and asked where the corresponding disciplinary procedure was. AF explained that disciplinaries would go to the Proctors. RJ noted that on the membership side we have Bye-Laws 16 and 17 on removal and suspension, and on the sabbatical officer side, it is a matter for the staff handbook and internal grievance procedures. TF suggested that there should be outcomes in between suspension of membership and nothing, such as the suspension of a limited number of entitlements. AF explained that OUSU does not really offer anything that can be suspended in this way, noting that we would not remove student access to the Student Advice Service for example. The Board recognised that there are no sufficient sanctions that OUSU has the option of putting in place.

The Board noted the proposed changes to Bye-Laws and Regulations.

The Board noted specifically the changes to Council's Executive.

NC informed the Board that OUSU are proposing to open the franchise of VP Graduates for two reasons. NC explained that the Education Act states that any major union office must be elected by all members, and his role currently is not a major union office in the University's eyes. NC noted that the University would prefer that this changes so the role may be deemed a major union office. NC added that in addition to this, the current system means that he is elected partially by those he will never represent and vice versa. TF asked why we are not opening the franchise of VP Women if this is the case, and also noted that no-one has ever been prosecuted under the 1994 Education Act. NC replied that the University will define the major union office holders to be those who sit on University Council and committees of Council which includes VP Graduates, but does not include VP Women. The Board discussed the fact that the risk is with the University rather than OUSU, but that this change would make the situation more secure.

The Board endorsed the opening of the franchise of the VP Graduates.

7. Complaints (Paper 5 & Appendix 7)

RH noted that the complaints procedure has been to the Board before, where suggestions were made for some edits. The Board agreed it is now accessible and easily understood. JH suggested that we encourage more informal resolutions. RH disagreed, stating that in some instances, where people know each other, and the issues are sensitive, it is not appropriate for an informal resolution to happen. The Board agreed that we can include words along the lines of "if you feel able to you should attempt a formal resolution", so people are not obliged to do so. The Board agreed the procedure would be re-drafted to include this. TF suggested that in relation to appeals, people should have to either provide new evidence, or proof of an irregular process. TF agreed to provide wording on this. The Board agreed that this would come into place in first week of Trinity alongside the new Bye-Laws.

Action – RH to make the suggested edits before circulating the final draft to the Board for approval via email.

8. Date of the next meetings

RH confirmed that this will take place on Thursday 16th June, 10–2pm.