

Trustee Board

Minutes

16th June 2015, 11am

Sutro Room, Trinity College, Oxford, OX1 3BH

Present:

James Blythe (JB) *VP Access and Academic Affairs*, Anna Bradshaw (AB) *VP Women*, James Elliott (JE) *Student Trustee*, Tom Flynn (TF) *External Trustee*, James Hunt (JH) *External Trustee*, Harini Iyengar (HI) *External Trustee*, Richard Jackson (RJ) *External Trustee*, Jack Matthews (JM) *VP Graduates*, Ruth Meredith (RM) *VP Charities and Community*, Will Neaverson (WN) *Student Trustee*, and Louis Trup (LT) *Chair*.

In Attendance:

Nick Cooper (NC) *VP Graduates Elect*, Lucy Delaney (LD) *VP Women Elect*, Amelia Foster (AF) *CEO*, Ami Gell (AG) *Democratic Support Officer*, Rebecca Howe (RH) *President Elect*, Cat Jones (CJ) *VP Access and Academic Affairs Elect*, Alasdair Lennon (AL) *VP Welfare and Equal Opportunities Elect*, and Emily Silcock (ES) *VP Charities and Community Elect*.

1. Apologies

Apologies received from Eden Tanner (ET) *Student Trustee*.

2. Welcome

The Chair invited all present to introduce themselves.

3. Minutes from previous meeting (Paper 1)

RM provided an update on the Oxford Hub and informed the board that OUSU offered the Hub funding for a 0.5 staff member. This offer was turned down. Added that they had the chance to propose what they wanted themselves, but were not cooperative, and as the budget deadline had now passed, OUSU had been unable to do anything.

The minutes were approved.

Item 6 moved up the agenda.**6. CEO's Report (Paper 4, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 4e, 8)**

AF presented the report, noting the budget as the key item for approval. Explained intention to spend some reserves on the Student Advice Service (SAS), with the introduction of term time Saturday morning drop in sessions, and the use of live chat software.

The Board questioned how much money would be left in the reserves following these plans.

Action: AF to check exact figure and circulate to the board. AF explained that some reserves

are in a designated fund to support the fit out of a new building which meets our requirements (i.e. not 4 Worcester Street).

CEO's Strategic Plan (Paper 4a)

AF presented the strategy paper, setting out the intended work for the next six to nine months. TF raised the issue that this is too much work for the CEO alone, and suggested using a section of the reserves to look at a Membership Services Manager Role. Approximated £60,000 to initially cover two years' fixed term. Added that this would provide the sabbatical officers with additional support from a senior level. There was general agreement amongst the board that this is a good idea.

Board members flagged that this needs to be ready prior to the proposed three-year budget, and ideally that the post should exist by September, in order to support the new officers at the start of the academic year. A strategic risk was also highlighted, due to the previous CEO suffering with their health. **Action: AF** to try to find a date to hold a Board strategic planning day in late July.

Post-meeting note – AF has flagged that a meeting in July will not be possible, and that this is likely to take place in September.

Budget 2015/16 (Paper 4b)

The Board approved the budget for 2015/16.

Prevent Action Plan (Paper 8)

AF reported that Prevent does not operate within the criminal sphere, and is simply preventing those we may feel are at risk of radicalisation. Noted that training and risk assessment will take place over the summer. Explained that the Student Advice Service Manager had already received WRAP training, as the SAS might be more likely to come across those who may be being radicalised. Acronyms explained as Thames Valley Police (TVP) and Workshop to raise awareness of Prevent (WRAP). HI asked if there are a mix of genders and races in the SAS. AF confirmed that this is not the case. JH suggested that external speakers are the element of the plan which need to be considered most closely. Agreed that we need to find out what OUSU's level of responsibility is and make it very clear. Noted that responsibility also falls to the University, and that as OUSU do not have control of clubs and societies, there is less to be concerned about. AF highlighted that it would be different if an OUSU campaign invited a speaker. TF suggested that if we had a good policy in place, this could be good leverage with the proctors in the future regarding clubs and societies. JB informed the board that the University will be revising their Freedom of Speech policy in Michaelmas. Advised that OUSU have a role to play in supporting the Islamic Society.

JE informed the board that when discussing this paper with students, a number of serious concerns were raised, including who was involved in the drafting and what the legal requirements are. AF explained that the paper is based on the TVP action plan. Stated that we also need to do a risk assessment regardless, and that the SAS are trying to build more links with the Counselling Service and the Disability Advisory Service. Informed the board that the SAS cannot be accredited to Advice UK without this. Stated that the rest of the paper is just focussed on information sharing, and that it is as light touch as possible.

HI questioned what happens and where information goes if the SAS feel that they have to share something. AF responded that she is yet to receive her training on the processes. JE expressed more specific concerns over the definitions of extremism and radicalisation, as well as the fact that Freedom of Expression needs to be taken into account. Reported that one student had raised a fear that you could not go to the SAS to say that you believe a tutor to be a racist, without being sent to a de-radicalisation camp. AF responded that believing this would be a discredit to the SAS. HI raised a concern that some students may still feel alienated from the SAS as a response to this.

JB informed the board that this will be law on 1st July, so there is no choice but to pass it. Reported that the Vice-Chancellor wrote to the Prime Minister, and the best edit which Oxford managed to achieve was the addition of 'particular regard for freedom of speech'. LT added that the University still has Freedom of Speech legislation which will still operate.

JE continued that one particular student that he showed this to was horrified by it, and suggested that it would be useful to show it to others, including the Islamic Society. Informed the board that he could not endorse it as it currently stood. AF explained that the ultimate consequence of not signing up to this would be resignation as a trustee, as this has to be done. Comments were made about this being a good piece of work done on a bad piece of legislation, that it covers the bare minimum and is light touch, and that OUSU needs to communicate this to students in a wider context of legislation, rather than viewing it in isolation. AF added that there is an element of common sense involved, and with or without this legislation, the SAS would pass on information if they thought there was a risk of someone doing something dangerous. WN suggested that while the board are here to consider the legal element, broad opposition can still be supported via other channels, including OUSU Council. LT agreed that a motion can be taken to Council which shows opposition to the policy. **Action:** **AF** agreed to revisit the policy to see if it can be made lighter touch in any way.

Board agreed to pass this, whilst noting that they did not want to do so.

4. Sabbatical Officers' Thoughts (Paper 2)

RM highlighted the key issues brought up in the sabbatical officers' reports to the Trustee Board. These were structure of OUSU, extra-curricular activities and the need for increased support for the CEO. RJ asked for clarification as to what 'extra-curricula' referred to. RM

clarified that this referred to campaigns and clubs and societies.

WN asked what was being done to reduce the workload of the VP Access and Academic Affairs (as referred to in JB's report). JB explained that his successor will be taking on fewer committees and will be spending more time on Target Schools.

On the subject of Target Schools, AF reported to the Board that OUSU is bringing in a new safeguarding policy.

AB raised the work done by the outgoing sabbatical team on revisiting the remits and encouraged the new sabbatical team to look further into the possibility of reworking the officer remits.

JH encouraged the Board to weave threads from this paper into the strategy day. On this, RJ commented that these thoughts should be covered in the handover to the new team. In conducting the strategy day over the summer, RJ commented that with this paper in mind, the board must look holistically and ensure that all areas of enquiry fit together and thus must start with a broad umbrella. JM added to this that the Board must look at the historical developments in the areas we visit.

5. Strategic Business (Paper 3)

AF suggested that there can be tension between one-year manifestos and three-year strategic plans and questioned how this is best dealt with. Noted that strategic plans may include elements which no sabb has been elected on, but that they are required to help out in delivering. Added that having the OUSU President as the Chair of the Board is also structurally difficult as they are an employee. Proposed a deputy chair is appointed from the externals to support the CEO with HR/staffing issues. Flagged the on-going issue about how the Board is perceived but noted that this has improved due to reporting between Council and the Board.

LT ran through the first question on the paper and reiterated the earlier point about marrying up the aims of the sabs with the long-term strategic plan. AB suggested that when consulting students is discussed, work that has already been done is fed in, as it counts towards the overall consideration of strategy. Added that it is appropriate to have some strategic directions that relate to staff work, which could continue regardless of changes in political direction. RM suggested the use of the remits consultation, providing students the opportunity to feed in further on flagged areas. Added that those things which already work must be noted.

TF explained that a strategic plan is broken down into a vision, mission, aims and enablers. Added that while the vision and mission are broadly the same in all SUs, and that as an SU we should recognise what our enablers are, the aims should come out of student consultation.

JB reminded the board that the University is OUSU's primary funder, and that there is potentially more money if aims are connected. Urged that we have to be able to explain student priorities in connection with University priorities.

LT summarised that a targeted approach based on our aims was favoured.

LT moved to the second question, and suggested that the Board consider it in line with the fact that OUSU is not getting the voices of all students.

RJ suggested that it might not be helpful to start from a position that there are said to be differences between 'charitable and political arms'. In his view, while the charitable model was not a comfortable fit for student unions, it was not impossible to see OUSU as first and foremost a student union, which operated as a charity.

JM noted that it will be hard to convince those only here with a one year plan to buy in to the idea of looking at longer-term issues. Urged that we open the door and ensure that people know they are answering long-term questions. Stated that it needs a form of democratic stamp for people to buy in.

JH reminded the board that OUSU still has two organs of government with Council and the Board, and urged that the relations between the two need to be as strong as possible. TF argued that the question sets up a false dichotomy, and that in any other SU, they will not view separate 'arms' in this way, as it is an SU aim to make their officers successful.

HI stated that some people may never be interested in being involved with OUSU, but still remain pleased with the work that is done. Added that we need to ensure that those who are involved are representatives.

In relation to the third question, RJ noted that OUSU is in no way unique in its struggles with effective engagement and communication issues, however recognised that these issues are part of why the need to shake up the communications team is so vital. TF identified further potentially problematic barriers which all SUs have, including finance, facilities and staffing/HR. AB listed barriers that are specific to OUSU, including the collegiate system, the very slow pace of the university, the problems with volunteering, the lack of a proper building and the fact the clubs and societies are under the remit of the proctors. RM commented on how time spent firefighting can block achievement, with sabs easily losing a month at a time when unexpected problems arise. Stressed that it is essential for all sabs to buy into the strategy and work as a team, as any relationship breakdowns will have an effect.

The board suggested a working group to think about these issues alongside plans for an away day. **Action: AF and RH** to organise this. LT suggested that the board narrow down the questions that they are focusing on at the away day, and JM stated that the away day should not finish without a clear timetable and plan detailing how these things will be delivered.

7. Finance Committee Update (Paper 5)

JH asked the board to approve the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill as OUSU's auditors for the next three years. WN questioned why these are better than Critchleys. JH explained that OUSU was the only student union which Critchleys dealt with, while Crowe Clark Whitehill have a portfolio of around thirty student unions, and have worked with the NUS. RJ asked if 7.5k is the market rate. JH replied that this was within a range of offers. TF advised going back and making an offer. JH explained that this price included OSSL.

JB suggested that OUSU consider the make up of Finance Committee, which has no student trustees, and a majority of employees. WN stated that Budget Sub-Committee used to appoint someone to send as a representative. LT explained that this is no longer the case now it has changed to Budget Advisory Group, and reminded the board of the concerns surrounding shadow trustees. Noted that the board would ensure a student trustee sits on the committee in future.

The board approved the appointment of Crowe Clark Whitehill.

8. Complaints Procedure and Harassment Policy (Paper 6)

AB reminded the board that at their previous meeting it was agreed that a new group would be set up to make decisions on this. AB, JM and ET have worked on this, and found a major problem to be the absence of a harassment procedure, which they have also drafted. JH questioned why both were required. AB explained that the harassment procedure has been adopted from the University, and would not cover complaints. Added that this echoes the university in having separate policies for different issues. Noted that the complaints procedure only covers elected officers, while the harassment policy relates to staff members. AB requested thoughts from the board of the procedure. JB advised that it was passed by a vote. AB agreed, particularly considering that the previous version was sent back due to loud opposition from a small minority. JH noted that it was a good piece of work and a great improvement.

TF noted that complaints about democratic procedure should be the remit of council, and that external opinion on this is irrelevant, adding that you do find students trying to litigate via the complaints procedure.

AB asked the Board if they thought there should be a non-exhaustive list of who can be complained about. LT raised the fact that campaign chairs are elected by their campaign rather than by council, and that they are much less within OUSU than the executive. AB added that it is worth noting that Council have passed complaints procedures for campaigns within their constitutions. The Board discussed who should be complainable, and if it should be all OUSU members, but decided that it should be limited to elected students who have agreed to represent OUSU in some way, recognising that incidents involving non-elected students at OUSU events can be referred to the proctors.

AB highlighted previous struggles by the Complaints Committee to find effective remedies and questioned if sanctions should be outlined. RJ agreed that there have been occasions where the remedy is an apology, however the student has refused to apologise.

WN raised the issue of distinguishing between personal and work place complaints. AB stated that this policy leads to a number of different policies which should clarify the grey areas. Asked

if it would be useful for this policy to include reference to other policies and example remedies. Board agreed that this would be helpful.

AB explained that the current draft allowed no more than two weeks for the complaint as an aim for when the complain would be concluded. Asked the board if this is an appropriate amount of time. TF advised using the phrasing 'working days' rather than 'weeks'. Board agreed that it may not always be possible to resolve within two weeks, but the student should always be at least able to expect a response within this time.

AB asked if the information surrounding resolutions was correct, and if further details were required. HI stated that this comes back to the issue of sanctions, as a student could wait for an apology and never receive one. JB suggested that in that case OUSU could revoke membership.

TF suggested that the line which states that a student is not required to seek an informal resolution should not be included. AB explained that she fought for this line to be included in the harassment policy at the university, as it is key in instances where you are fighting with someone who has power over you. TF agreed. HI stated that the consequences need to be clarified.

AB asked if the appeal in harassment procedure seemed appropriate. The Board agreed that it was. AB flagged that she is drafting this envisioning five student trustees. The Board approved policies and next steps. **Action: AB** to move on to the next steps outlined in paper 6.

Statutory Elections Timing (Paper 12)

LT updated the board on the referendum, and the result that students have voted to move the statutory elections to Hilary term. Added that he had since submitted a paper to JS(EC)SM, who want to do a significant level of consultation with the University on this matter, meaning that the timing of the elections will not be able to change in the upcoming academic year.

WN stated that he did not agree with the results, due to his belief that the high turnout was down to sub fusc, and the results were consequently not indicative of consideration. Added that he is aware that none of his tutors would have allowed him to run in Hilary term, meaning that the elections would not be free and fair. LT stated that if we have referenda, we have to take the result. TF added that accepting one result and not another would be a terrible precedent to set, and that it will be the University's responsibility to shift their processes in order to ensure that the elections remain free and fair.

AB agreed that we do not have a choice about whether or not we agree with the result, but that we should as a board note the incredibly high number of abstentions on this issue.

WN also highlighted the issue that the 'yes'/'no' options should all be phrased consistently where 'yes' refers to the status quo, as this comment came out of a complaint that was made.

The referendum outcome was endorsed by the Board with those caveats noted. The Board authorised the President to consult and negotiate agreements with the University and others. If an agreement is reached, the annual elections due in MT2016 would instead be held in HT2017.

Quinquennial Review Update (Paper 13)

LT informed the board that there is now a near final draft ready on which Sally Mapstone will have the final sign off. Noted that there are a few small phrasing issues to amend on both sides. The Board noted GPC's approval of OUSU's proposals for revised Articles. The Board approved the most recent draft Introduction and Commentary. The Board delegated approval of the final (fine-tuned) text to the incoming President supported by AF and RJ. A special note of thanks was given to RJ for all of the work he has put into the review process.

Any Other Business

JM – Raised a point of AOB prior to leaving, that he would be taking the role of Chair of Council in Michaelmas, and would like a discussion with the board over the summer about when the General Meeting should take place.

HI asked that when emails are sent out to the board, they have a clear read and reply date set out in the subject line. Board agreed.