

Trustee Board

Minutes

16th June 2016, 10:00am
St Peter's 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*, Harini Iyengar (HI) *External Trustee*, Richard Jackson (RJ) *External Trustee*, Catherine Jones (CJ) *VP Access and Academic Affairs*, Alasdair Lennon (AL) *VP Welfare and Equal Opportunities*, Emily Silcock (ES) *VP Charities and Community*, Rose Vennin (RV) *Student Trustee*, and Benji Woolf (BW) *Student Trustee*.

In Attendance:

Beth Currie (BC) *VP Charities and Community Elect*, Sandy Downs (SD) *VP Welfare and Equal Opportunities Elect*, Amelia Foster (AF) *CEO*, Ami Gell (AG) *Democratic Support Officer*, Jack Hampton (JH) *President Elect*, and Marina Lambrakis (ML) *VP Graduates Elect*.

1. Apologies

Eden Bailey (EB) *VP Access and Academic Affairs Elect*, James Hunt (JH) *External Trustee*, and Orla White (OW) *VP Women Elect*.

2. Minutes from the previous meeting (Paper 1)

The minutes were approved by the board.

3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4. CEO's Report (Paper 2 & Appendices 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4 & 5)**The Board approved the 16/17 budget.**

AF requested that the Board approve the opening of two bank accounts, the context of which is that OUSU's reserves are currently held by the University, following a move a long time ago, after a decision was made that the coop bank was risky. Added that long-term, this is not an appropriate solution, so this will enable OUSU to take back their own money. Explained that OUSU has worked with the Environment and Ethics Campaign to select banks which do not invest in fossil fuels. Noted that this has already been seen and approved by the Finance Committee. ES informed the Board that the two banks selected are specifically ethical banks who have a good grasp of where their money is. AF informed the Board that there will be £75,000 in each, which will be covered by the FSCS, and that the remaining money will stay with the University, as we have three-year plans to spend that down.

TF asked if the University held our current account. AF clarified that they only hold our reserves, and we have a separate current account. AF added that we now have to take our pensions liability onto our balance sheet, which means the three-year budget which was submitted to the University in October

with the target of getting down to four months of reserves will appear incorrect, as it will show that we will only have two months of reserves. We will still hold the money, despite showing it as a liability. AF added that we have an audit planning meeting in August to discuss this further, but reassured that this is an OK position to be in. TF suggested even less caution, stated that he is not worried about the SU reserves going below two months, as the Charity Commission guidance which said three months was rescinded 4 years ago. Added that a large majority of OUSU's income is block grant, which is a very stable position to be in, as there is no record of any University ever letting their student union go bankrupt. Added that we should be looking at better ways to spend the money on the students. RJ asked if reserves is still on the agenda for the Finance Committee. AF explained that it has already been agreed for three years, both with the University and the Trustee Board. TF questioned why the signatures of the accounts were not officer trustees. AF responded that we already have 5 bank accounts, which takes up an enormous amount of our Account Manager's time already changing these over at the end of each year. Added that it can take several months into the year before it they have all been approved. Noted however that officers will still authorise spending, so they have control, but we are not adding the Accounts Manager's burden of work.

The Board approved the opening of two bank accounts and passed the bank account resolutions.

The Board noted the Finance Committee minutes.

AF asked if there were any comments on the SAS report. RJ suggested that we pass on our sincere thanks and congratulations to the manager of the service, for the huge improvements over recent years. AF added that the manager, Cate Hemingway, has submitted our Advice Quality Standard accreditation application this week, and has also finished her NVQ in Advice.

TF asked if the SAS offer direct representation work. AL confirmed that they do not, but that they can go to meetings with students and can help prepare submissions. AL noted that he has done a recommendation in his report that advocacy work should be investigated, as he considers it a big gap in our service provision, specifically for disabled students, and students that are not comfortable facing a panel alone. AL added that advocacy work can fall to Common Room presidents which is less than ideal, and proposed a potential solution that we take on graduate law students to work on this, however noted that this will take some time and research.

TL noted that he has never experienced an advice service across the sector that do not do this, and supported AL strongly with his recommendation.

AF suggested that if OUSU is to go down this route, we would employ someone specifically to be an advocate. AF added that our advisors do attend these meetings with students, but do not advocate on their behalf. AL added that his suggestion of taking on graduate students would also fit well with our aim of providing more part-time work opportunities to students. NC agreed that he would be in favour of this providing that there was sufficient training.

BH suggested that the new Chair of Trustees and the Chief Executive bring an update on this to the next meeting of the Board. AF noted that she would not be in the organisation at this point, but would begin work with JH on this, in preparation for October.

AF highlighted the section on staffing in her report, and added that in addition to those mentioned, Ami Gell, the Democratic Support Officer will be leaving the organisation to move on to a new role. AF added that our new Communications Manager, Jo Gregory-Brough, is starting next week.

AF reported that paper 1a covers what she was going to do, based on discussions last year, to get the organisation into shape, most of which has been achieved.

CJ noted that the Access Vision is listed as in progress, but is now complete and has been signed off.

Paper 1a was noted by the Board.

AF moved on to paper 1b, and suggested that the Board spend some time discussing our strategic priorities, and whether everyone is happy with them, or has any changes, concerns, thoughts or queries.

TF informed the Board that he has been in a position himself where he has started as a new CEO and been faced with a new strategic plan, and reported that the first thing that he wanted to do was pick it apart and start again. TF noted that to do this took 6 months, and therefore suggested that we defer passing this for 6 months, in order to empower the new CEO. AF noted that there was no complete strategic plan that she could even find when she started, and it would have been very helpful if one existed. AF suggested that it would be useful for the new CEO to have something in place with a direction of where the organisation is going. TF disagreed, and stated that this is about ownership and responsibility, even if the content and priorities would actually be very similar. RJ suggested a middle ground, where we present this as the outgoing team's work to date, reminding the Board that this is not solely the CEO's strategic plan, but that it is OUSU's strategic plan.

RJ explained that the new CEO will have the option to decide if they want to do any more work on a plan themselves. TF agreed to endorse this approach.

The Board agreed to have the strategic plan ready at an advanced stage ready for the new CEO, but agreed that it would not be published.

CJ noted that the plan is very good, student-facing, with clear measures of engagement. CJ suggested that the visions should feature as they are a key part of OUSU's identity. AB stated that there is something unclear about OUSU's identity, and in this section of the plan, there should be something about articulating and communicating who we are and what we do, as well as who you can go to for specific projects, and how we can support you. AF informed the Board that the new website will help to achieve this, and will answer the questions about what OUSU does. The Board discussed how important it is to reach those students who currently feel that OUSU does not do anything for them.

TF suggested that the plan should include more things on the actual impact on students, explaining that we need to know what impacts we want to achieve from our output, and how we have positively affected students' lives. AF recognised that the difficulty for us is that so much of this work is in its infancy, and for us, the output alone is a success for us in some of these areas, which we are building upon. HI added that we need something really inventive to see how our services are progressing.

RV suggested that we mention something which is specifically designed for freshers, as we need to start implementing a culture where OUSU is something in the minds of students as soon as they start. RV added that we can build a cycle, which in 3 years' time, all students will understand what OUSU is and how OUSU matters to them. CJ seconded this, suggesting that we make more of the first email that we send to freshers, which is a real opportunity which we need to exploit. AF informed the Board that the new Communications Manager will be starting on this work the following week. HI suggested that we use videos on the website more, rather than providing lots of material to read. AF agreed and informed the Board that the Communications Manager is an expert in this area. LD told the Board that the big names and faces worked really well at Freshers Fair, and people did start to recognise them and know who we are when they went into common rooms, so suggested that we try and get the officers faces and OUSU branding up in common rooms. LD also agreed with the suggestion of more videos, which were very successful when she and BH were running the 'Yes2NUS' campaign. NC echoed the point of freshers engagement, particularly for taught masters students who are only at the University for a year. NC cautioned on the instant feedback in the plan, in relation to the fact that we have not created a lot of policies now which are strategic and longer term, and also commented on the proposed democratic review, which we have done a lot of over the last year. NC suggested that we should not start changing things again until we see how the recent changes work out.

JH suggested that we try and balance the more corporate branding approach, with the personal, so students see the officers as approachable individuals that they can comfortably speak to and work with. JH added that it is important that in any sort of public sphere, we talk about what we do and why we are beneficial in simple terms, which is accessible to the general student body.

ML highlighted that we fail graduate students in many ways, and questioned if this could be folded into the success criteria in some way, as some of the existing criteria may even exclude grads in some way. AF informed the Board that the active course rep network are reaching grads, and that we are also offering more work opportunities which are usually for graduate students, but noted that she would include more information on graduate engagement.

AL suggested that we set a success indicator, such as 'students will have a meaningful interaction with OUSU 3 times a year'. TF suggested two statements along the lines of: "80% of students say that OUSU has a positive impact on their lives" and "80% of students say they are satisfied with OUSU." TF explained that these are the golden questions, but that there is often a discrepancy between the two.

TF recognised that it does not have to be 80%, but that some KPI should be set for those two questions. TF added a third OUSU-specific statement: “A percentage of those on common room committees who think that OUSU has a positive impact in helping them to run their common room.”

LD reported that we definitely are having an impact on students, but those students often do not know that it is us doing so. LD explained that if you have been a women’s officer, welfare officer, president etc. in a common room, you are likely to have been trained by OUSU, if you have received contraception at cost price that is OUSU, if you are one of the 200 people at a WomCam event, that is an OUSU event. LD urged that OUSU needs to do more to put their name to the work that they are doing.

The Board discussed the successful response to surveys over the last year, which seem to be down to incentivising, as well as running surveys that students are genuinely interested in the results of. HI asked if there is survey data that can be broken down by students, and show diversity. BH replied that this is the case, and forms a huge part of the welfare survey. HI noted that this is very useful to target certain groups, and to understand which groups are using which services.

AF informed the Board that one of the issues that we have is bringing together all the different elements of OUSU, and making them recognisably part of the same thing, which means getting the branding correct is crucial. AF explained that we have come up with a new exciting brand which will bring all elements together, through our own font based on the Oxford skyline. AF added that the font is beautiful, and will bring together all of our work, and **agreed to circulate it to the board**. RJ questioned if all of the campaigns accept that they are a part of OUSU. AF informed the Board that the Membership Services Manager is meeting with all of the campaigns, and working on these relationships.

AF to circulate the Impact Report later in the week.

The Board to fill in their SWOT and PESTLE analysis, and send them over to AF.

5. Sabbatical Officer’s Report (Paper 3)

CJ informed the Board that the report contains reflections from each officer on what they have done this year, as well as key reflections and recommendations from them as a team. CJ informed the Board that HR support is the first key recommendation, which is a point they are all united on. CJ explained that they have seen a huge amount of time, particularly AF’s time, and money spent on recruitment, staff support, staff development, with everything from contracts to conflicts ending up with AF. CJ stressed that this has a massive impact, firstly on AF’s time, but specifically it has a very tangible impact on current staff and sabbs, who we are letting down at the moment. CJ stated that the officers would really appreciate a discussion about what the right solution is, and how we can ensure that everyone has the HR support that they need.

CJ also highlighted the issues of safeguarding, explaining that Target Schools still worries her. CJ noted that she would be sitting down with EB and the new Membership Services Manager to look at this, but would request that a full report comes back to the next Board meeting on this. CJ explained that the first incident was one of the pupils had spent the entire morning in the bedroom of an undergraduate. CJ explained that she had a conversation with the University about this, who could not confirm that we were covered legally. CJ explained that the second incident was more to do with organisation, as they had a phone call stating that a pupil had not been paired up and was missing, which turned out to not be the case at all, as they had been with a student all day. The Board questioned if we should be doing Target Schools if we are not doing it well enough, however CJ stated that she believes it is absolutely worthwhile, and something OUSU should be doing, and that the existing problems are fixable. The Board discussed the problem with sabbatical officers having to deal with these issues, and it was noted that it will be the Membership Services Manger's role to take responsibility for training and management of these campaigns. TF urged that if we are going to take a risk with Target Schools, we need to make sure that it is worth it. CJ reiterated that it is a core part of what we do, what we should be doing and what students want us to do.

AF suggested that Target Schools should not be a campaign, and should be lead by staff. TF suggested that EB get in touch with Anna-Marie Canning, Director of Widening Participation at King's College London, where a similar programme is run with the students' union.

The Board agreed that EB would work with the rest of the team to put together a paper on Target Schools ready for the next Board meeting.

LD informed the Board that a number of the sabbs feel that it is very important to have a member of staff to support welfare and liberation, and stated that moving around the existing remits of staff is not sufficient. LD stressed that we need a particular member of staff whose name and title and purpose is specifically for welfare and liberation coordination, adding that there is very little staff support for the VP Women and the VP WEO. LD explained that there is a lot of admin, training and management needed for campaigns, and they require specialist support from someone who has a background in welfare and liberation. LD informed the Board that she spent the whole of her summer doing consent workshop coordination, meaning her entire remit was put on hold. BH added that this role would be very different to Membership Services, as the Manager will oversee campaigns which will make a big difference, but the point is about having a member of staff who is working specifically on welfare and liberation, from conducting research to compiling data for the sabbatical officers and campaigns to use. AF informed the Board that the Office Manager will be dealing with the administrative side of the consent workshops, that we will be doing all of the printing and distribution of the materials ourselves, that we have the money to employ a data analyst and we have a new member of staff supporting campaigns.

AF clarified that she is not necessarily disagreeing, but noted that we have all these new things that we have not yet seen working in practise, and we need to give them an opportunity to pan out. AL stated that the scope for this potential role is huge, with about 120 welfare reps across colleges, and approximately 300 liberation officers, which we do not currently have the capacity to train and work with. AL added that the liberation campaigns present a very real risk to OUSU sometimes, and require a great deal of care and handling. HI thanked the sabs for being honest about this, and raised a concern about the amount of stress they are put under. HI questioned if the sabs would like some kind of coaching from the CEO on an informal basis, or alternatively some supervision/counselling to help manage and deal with the issues which they face. AL replied that they do have supervision, which he has used himself, but added that they also face harassment both online and in person. BH highlighted that those particular roles can be emotionally draining, but noted that all officers face harassment at some point, and that she herself has faced a lot of online abuse. AF informed the Board that there are a lot of provisions in place, and that we have training on managing emotions in the workplace, dealing with students in distress, assertiveness, handling conflict, and difficult conversations as part of handover. AF recognised that there may be more that needs doing, but is not sure what that is.

LD stated that we are one of the only student unions that do not have a staff role in this area, and other women's officers have discussed how invaluable it is. TF recognised that it is a crucial area for staff support, but raised that we can only split the money so many ways. HI asked if we can ask the University for money for this. AF stated that there is no hope for this, and they have already turned down requests for funding for additional staff members. TF informed the Board that a lot of unions are merging Student Voice and Student Advice to achieve this if there is not a sufficient amount of money, and perhaps this issue should be part of a broader discussion.

BH stated that this is something that needs to be taken forward by AF, her successor and the sabbatical successors. NC claimed that this is interlinked with the HR issue, as because of the level of stress, and because of the emotional engagement, it does spill over into the staff, and it is very important for support to be there for those staff.

RJ noted that the sabbatical reports are excellent, and encouraged the officers to celebrate their successes. TF agreed that they were very good reports.

AL reiterated that the advocacy work has to be looked into, and it is work that must be undertaken.

AF stated that she was disappointed to hear the comment that staff are being let down, noting that when she began at OUSU no staff had appraisals, that she meets with all staff every other week and spends huge amounts of time supporting them emotionally as well as in their work. AF added that the fact that a number of the staff are going on to promotions suggest that they are getting the level of support which they require, but accepted that this takes up a huge amount of time, and that the recruitment of senior managers should alleviate this. AF also added that there is a whole staff programme in place for training, as well as training budgets for each department.

CJ replied that this comment was not a reflection on the work that AF has done, and recognised that she has put a lot of good new things in place, but explained that the problem was a structural one, and when everything falls to the CEO, it is the really little things that end up not getting done. TF advised the Board to not underestimate the power of a senior leadership team, and the sheer amount of work that they will take off the CEO's plate. AF added that a lot of the little things are also now in place, as there is now a staff handbook, all the policies will be in place before she leaves, and the new server is functioning with access to all necessary staff forms. ES stated that for the money spent on HR recruitment, we could have employed a member of staff for the whole year. ES added that this is not a resource issue, and this is something that can be thought about seriously. AF explained that this recruitment was used as we were unsuccessful the first time around in recruiting a Communications Manager, and consultants can spend a long time ringing around talking to people. TF suggested working with Brookes and buying a consultant across the two student unions.

6. Impact Report (Paper 4)

NC asked for the Board to note that once the Communications Manager is in place, and a communications strategy has been developed, then the Board needs to return to the issue of better engagement with graduate students.

The Board took the impact report as read, noting that point from NC.

7. CEO Recruitment (Paper 5 & Appendix 6 & 7)

BH thanked TF for his invaluable work on this. BH updated the Board that progress is moving well, and that in the afternoon they would be having three meetings with Emma, the lead at Peridot, one with the outgoing sabbs, one with the senior managers and one with AF.

The Board noted the revised timeline.

BH informed the Board that they need to appoint an external trustee and a student trustee to join the chair of trustees on a monitoring group to oversee the process. BH suggested that the external trustee is TF.

The Board appointed Tom Flynn as the external trustee and Alex Bishop as the student trustee to sit on the monitoring group.

BH asked the Board to discuss a plan of action for if there is a gap between AF leaving and a new CEO starting, explaining that we are interviewing in August, and there is likely to be a three-month notice period if the successful candidate is already a CEO. AF stated that she would continue to do one day a week for OUSU in September, and would two and a half days at Freshers' Fair in October. BH suggested that the gap will not be sufficiently large to appoint an interim CEO. TF agreed with this, and proposed that we look into whether the successful candidate is able to do a phased start.

TF added that if the gap is likely to be anything longer than one month, then there needs to be one member of staff as a pointed individual to be elevated just for the interim. RJ suggested that one of the reasons for having a monitoring group is to relieve the Board of making decisions like that.

TF asked if we will have an emergency Board meeting after the selection panel has met, in order to confirm the appointment, and suggested that we put a date in as soon as possible, as it will be difficult with diaries. **BH agreed to send out a meeting request for the day of the final interview, as agreed by Peridot.**

Board approved the monitoring group taking the lead on this issue, who will keep the Board in the loop.

8. Student Trustees (Paper 6)

RJ stated that he does not wish to add anything but is happy to take any questions. HI suggested that we create a profile of the existing student trustees, so we have some material to distribute to potential candidates.

RV informed the Board that she has been offered an internship in France, so stated that she would not be here to serve as a trustee for the next academic year.

The Board approved paper 6.

9. Appointing Trustees to handle complaints (Paper 7)

BH asked the Board if they are happy to approve the idea of having an external trustee appointed to handle complaints on an annual basis and a student trustee appointed to handle complaints on a termly basis.

AL suggested that we provide the student trustees with some training on how to handle these complaints. **The Board approved the paper with this caveat.**

Harini Iyengar was appointed as the external trustee to handle complaints.

Benji Woolf was appointed as the student trustee to handle complaints.

10. AOB

TF asked that we set the meetings for next year in advance.

Below the line

11. Associate Membership (Paper 8)

12. NUS Referendum (Paper 9)

The paper was noted and approved.