

**Trustee Board Minutes (Amalgamated with Finance & General Purposes Committee)**

**Held on 25th February 2020**

**By Videoconference (08H09, H113A, MD008A and BA-02-012)**

**Present:**

Andrew McAnallen, President (Chair) David Longstaff, Chief Executive

Aaron Ward, Lay Trustee Colin Campbell, Operations Director

Nicole Parkinson-Kelly, Vice President Education Clodagh Kennedy, Finance Director

Kirsten Watters, Lay Trustee Avril Honan, Membership Director

Chris Chambers, Vice President Sports & Wellbeing

Collette Cassidy, Vice President, Magee **In Attendance:**

Cathal Conway, Student Trustee Shauna Murphy, Vice President, Belfast

Ashley Neill, Lay Trustee Jackie Taggart, Note Taker

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| **Meeting Notes** | **Action** | **Update** |
| **Agenda item 1: Welcome:**  The Chair welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He informed that earlier this week, we received a communication from Robert Stewart who is standing down as a Director of UUSU with immediate effect. We thanked him for his years of service and, if appropriate, we will send appreciation to Robert on behalf of the Board. This was agreed. DL advised that, due to the Agenda of Finance & General Purposes Committee being duplicated in the Trustee Board Agenda, the meetings be amalgamated today. This was agreed. | AMcA to send on appreciation to RS on Board’s behalf. |  |
| **Agenda item 2: Apologies:**  There were no apologies. |  |  |
| **Agenda item 3:** **Declaration of Interest:**  There were no declarations. |  |  |
| **Agenda item 4: Starred Items:**  There were no starred items. |  |  |
| **Agenda item 5: Minutes:**  Minutes of 27th November 2019 were approved. DL informed that a portion of the Minutes had been put under Reserved Business and was not included in the Sharepoint documents as it was an HR matter. Reserved Minutes should be kept in a depository through JT in future and not circulated to ensure they are unbreachable. This was agreed. | Reserved Minutes are not to be circulated going forward. |  |
| **Agenda item 6: Matters Arising:**  Sports Review Update**:** DL updated that the consultation has now concluded, and initial recommendations have been shared with the University. CCh and DL had sight of them. They range from very useful to slightly unrealistic. We are interested in delivery of sport so there is duplication in what we and the University deliver which we need to unpick and see what streamlining of the amalgamated services might look like. The University has not committed to taking any recommendations forward, but the Head of Sports Services is ascertaining which are viable through a strategy document. As soon as we know what they are looking from our role, we will bring a paper to the subsequent meeting though ND as the SU role might be deviated to that of low-level administration. | ND to be invited to a future meeting. |  |
| **Agenda item 7: Chair’s Communication:**  AMcA advised of an Environmental Health Campaign which commenced planning in January for next Semester. The Officers went to Stormont on 1st February and have created a letter for students to send out to their MLAs and this will be carried out over the next few weeks, with students in Clubs and Societies and Halls of Residence being engaged to be more proactive. The Rent Right Campaign was launched with Housing Rights with Social Media content on how to rent and this is ongoing this month. Last month USI launched a Brexit Survey to gage student perception, and we are awaiting the results. The public consultation on bi-lingual signage closed on 7th February and we will send follow-up emails to the University as there was no substantive update. Elections are running from 6th March with 25th March being election night so the new Officer team will be announced then. 5 roles are contested and 2 uncontested so it is a good turn-out.  Election dates had to be moved a few weeks because of UCU strike which is ongoing, and there are 4 days of the strike again next week. We escalate students’ complaints around the action to the University and have written to MD MP (Minister of State for Universities), MS (Chair of the UCEA Board, Sir DE (Chair of the USS Trustee Board), and AJ (Chief Executive of Universities UK) to ask them to try to find a resolution to these strikes. The Vice Chancellor, PN, has resigned and leaves on 28th February. PB will take up the VC post until end of 2020 when the University has worked through the process of appointing a new VC. PB is focused on education, which is critical for us, so we are content with the appointment. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 8: Chief Executive Officer’s Update:**  DL updated on the civil proceedings case advising that it is a long-standing issue. The case was taken against the University, UUSU and the individual, with the incident occurring at a GAA sports match. The assault occurred after the game by one of our players and is a complex situation. The third party appears to have no intention of settling or entering mediation which would help bring the proceedings to a close, provided we could agree a figure, and it appears their legal representation is acting on a “no win, no fee” basis. We are working with a legal team to try to minimise exposure and are hopeful to get some form of support from the University if there is a pay award, but we cannot even have conversations currently to mitigate against any spiralling legal costs. We will continue to push for a resolution and for our legal representatives to let us have a fee estimate.  There have been headlines about the University’s inability to complete the Belfast Greater Development project without significant future investment. The University agreed a deal with the Department of Education to be funded £126,000,000 and the Department has asked the University to consider and submit a long-term sustainability plan. The upshot of the agreement with the Department is that it has imposed stringent terms on the University which will impact on us. The University must seek the Department’s agreement to any spend over £5,000,000 and has to produce a long-term sustainability plan to the Department who is to ascertain how it wants to see reserves built. This is a challenge for the University with no increase on its block grant. The University has been pragmatic about this as this funding model is better for them with its low interest rate.  We held our staff meeting before Christmas which proved to be a really successful launch for the new Policies. They are now live on Sharepoint and staff were given the opportunity to give feedback over the last 6 weeks. They also have a Staff Handbook which they can refer to.  It was also confirmed that a solidified partnership with Limelight in Belfast is in place where UUSU members can take their student cards on Thursday nights to get subsidised entry and queue jump.  There is now a Period Poverty facility on each campus where students can avail of free products. This is part-funded by the University and we need a long-term solution. AMcA is negotiating with MLAs to hopefully increase additional funding.  AW inquired as to the implications of the loan. This will be discussed later in the meeting. He also complimented DL for getting the branding out to the Limelight. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 9: Management Accounts:**  CK had circulated accounts up to 31st January 2020, halfway through the year, to take stock of what we spent and what we have left. She gave a brief summary. Income is down on budget due to commercial services. Magee Shop is losing money. The 2 catering outlets in Jordanstown and Magee have a slight increase, but both had sickness cover to pay out against 2 members of staff. There was an overall loss of £5,000. Expenditure is very much on budget. Admin Salaries and Wages: The Advice Manager post did not commence until December which was budgeted to start on 1st August. There were not as many student staff employed. Legal and Consultancy fees have an ongoing case relating to a student in the Sports Union for which we have been paying substantial legal fees. The HR process has yet to be resolved which may see a significant cost. At the end of January, we are losing £26,000. We have a lot more expenditure in the first half of the year and we are budgeting to break even or have a small loss at the end of the year. KW commented how the money saved in Salaries and Wages equals the legal costs which is an ironic balance. DL reminded that the legal consultancy in the South of Ireland was quite expensive. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 10: Operating Update:**  DL spoke on the election turn-out. Last year, there was a further increase to 13% and 42% voting. We hoped to break 15% this year and we still might. AH’s team are working hard, and the canvassing material is a lot more professional. Our concern is the strikes and having to push the elections so close to exams which pose a concern to push up the percentage this year so staying consistent at around the 13% mark would be equally good.  Course Reps training is ongoing although there is quite a significant drop from last year when 84% had been trained and only 50% this year. At the end of every year, Course Reps give significant feedback. We trained them in campus sessions with as many as we could put in the same room as a group orientated session and this was not well received. There was no room for communication within the group. AH tweaked more events but with lesser numbers, with 6 or 7 on each campus but there was a drop in attendance. It may be a case of reverting to what we did previously but won’t expect numbers to rise.  Operation of Commercial Services: Some staffing issues, of which one is ongoing, are eating into any profitability although the remaining issue should be brought to a conclusion by 2020/21. CC and DL are currently working on making the Magee shop less of a cost burden. Jordanstown will run its course in 20/21 but Magee/Coleraine are more complex. If we are going to explore the notion of outsourcing, it might be a local business is the way to push rather than a large conglomerate.  Governance: Regarding the Reserves, it is worth noting that there are 2 exceptional circumstances; Resolving the HR issue and the ongoing civil case in Ireland. CK and DL have to get to ground zero with these issues to be in a position to review how we are going to bank funds to get reserves to a more palatable £300,000 in the long term.  Performance Development Plans: A percentage of Officers and Staff have PDPs and Policies are now on stream, so we expect that to be in place by the summer, hopefully 100%.  AN spoke on qualitive feedback from completion of surveys rather than slightly more quantitative will add value and strike a balance. DL agreed that this is one of the things we want to change, and we would like it to become a lot tighter in the next 3 years with a gradual escalation. AN added that in evolution, emphasis should be put on what we are measuring rather than how we are measuring it. | AH to examine in the coming months |  |
| **Agenda Item 11: Risk Register:** DL informed that there were no substantive changes from the last meeting, but before a review happens it is worth pointing out:  SUSS Scheme: This is outside of our control, with a revaluation currently being carried out. Everything points towards a rise in payment. The current SUSS Trustees found historical underpayments. The good news on this is that they put out an offer to which 80% responded and of those 80% accepted the compromise offer. It therefore may be slightly less than we thought. CK is attending the AGM in March.  Insufficient Staff to Deliver Services: We are trying to make a conscious effort to do less even better than we currently do. Staff are working 120/130% capacity that is not sustainable to the extent that we don’t want the staff goodwill to diminish.  There are 2 comms focused risks that we expect to fall off: The website has had significant surgery with graphic design changing the navigational interface. Intranet is in place but needs someone to keep it fresh so when staff go on, it is more than a glorified document store. The organisation needs a mouthpiece to talk about success and going forward. AH asked for photographs of the Trustees and DL agreed, adding that they should do a biography to go with their head shot.  AN requested an update on Environmental Health standards not being met and DL replied that we had lost a number of staff and more stepped up and this is now completed. CC explained that the roll-out plan was complete, and we expect to be able to deescalate this. All staff now have Basic Hygiene Certificates and are aware of HACCP regulations that Environmental Health will look for. Risk Assessments have been completed for Jordanstown and Magee.  AN also asked if any steps had been taken to avoid sports legal proceedings being taken again and CK replied that we have had insurance to cover this from October. DL informed that this incident had taken place after the game had ended. Had it occurred during the game Croke Park would have dealt with it. Part of our defence is, how can we manage the actions of every individual that attends matches? This particular individual was found guilty in the criminal sense but will have no money to pay the costs. DL gave an example of another similar incident which had occurred, where the team went quickly over the border and the PSNI took no interest. CCh felt that players have to take responsibility for their actions. DL asked if there was a Code of Conduct in place, but this was only for athletes or those on scholarships. There was an uncertainty about Club Members, although whenever you sign up to join a Club, you are automatically acknowledging that you agree to the Terms and Conditions. DL thought the outcome of the Sports Review could make the risks significantly lower.  AW asked about Coronavirus Prevention Advice as there is a risk to front facing staff. AMcA replied that the University has been proactive and has a contingency plan in place and DL confirmed that 2 comms had been sent out to students with more to follow and that DB from the Advice Centre has sent information to UUSU staff giving information on how to protect themselves and those around them. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 12: Strategic Plan 2020-25:**  DL informed that in November, he and AMcA presented the plan to the University and left the meeting feeling quite confident. In January, with the University needing a substantial loan, their rhetoric then changed, and they are looking for savings across the departments. AMcA and DL said that savings from UUSU represents a challenge as it operates differently to other departments and the Student Experience cannot stagnate so although this is mitigated against, an uplift is no longer possible. There is no way to achieve what we wanted in the Plan with our current resources and therefore we have to halt our ambitious plan of a Communications and Business Development Department/outputs. I propose to streamline the length of the Strategic Plan and reduce the 6 strands to 3. We still have the idea of empowering our members as this is critical, and need to find a way of doing that as we have the notion of giving our students decision making authority within the organisation, giving scope in the long-term to become Officers, or have short-term basis roles. We would like to see an annual increase of 10% of students engaged and proactively shaping the organisation. We want to improve upon our satisfaction rate and lobby external organisations for something to happen year on year that students buy into. We also need to be accessible to our members, widening access to our services, so by the end of the Plan, 30% of students will have engaged in some form. We want an annual 10% increase in elections. There is a lack of scrutiny and accountability of Student Council for which we need a more coherent structure. Officers will have more accountability. The SUSS team do a great job in the early weeks providing connection to UUSU member representatives to students. We should pick up on the need for students to feel part of a community. For example, the Alumni network to gain mentor Officers and perhaps bring in money. We also need to look at getting 80% survey respondents, and perhaps re-developing our volunteering service. (This will be discussed later in the Agenda). We need to examine costs of offering events, the core one being Awards, and how we roll this out, with one celebration event for all students. He asked for approval of the recommendations from the Trustees on the points listed in his paper and in particular the notion to reduce the plan to cover a 3-year time-scale. A discussion ensued:  CCon felt the changes were sensible and it was an excellent idea to have awareness around engaging Alumni.  AW said the previous strategy was beautifully designed and articulated so was disappointed additional funding wasn’t available but felt that the change to 3 years is a wise decision – 2 years is too short. Consolidating down to 3 pillars is good. He asked what the big losses were in the Strategic Plan. DL replied these were to have the proactive ability around comms and to drive our income through business development. AW agreed but also felt that we should try to not lose sight of those because of fund limitations. DL said that we are also looking for ways in which we might access funding through third party fund writers acting on a monthly retainer so we would keep this on the Agenda. AW said he was happy to support this and provide advice.  KW reiterated that the loss of items on the Strategic Plan makes sense, and 3 years is a timely point to renew. Points 1 and 3 have the potential to save money by moving to 1 annual campaign and moving to 1 award. Releasing money from the existing budget to re-focus makes sense, although from that perspective, I am genuinely sorry we are not in the position we hoped we would be in. There may be potential to join with other charitable organisations as membership could help with resources and support in other areas. CO3 is a membership organisation for the third sector and allows the opportunity to have other ideas about raising potential funds.  AN agreed that this was the right road to go on to focus on areas where we can make changes and impact. The plan we had was aspirational and deliverability was always going to be difficult without significant investment. The loan will come with certain conditions and we want to retain good will and demonstrate that we can work to cut costs. Refresh, rebrand and make a big deal out of one event short term, anything that shows we are willing to manage and cut our cloth will go down well with the University.  AMcA said he echoed their sentiments and felt a bit more nuance in discussions on campaigns, more in terms of operation around raising awareness would be good. Stormont could be lobbied to get maximum coverage.  AW advised that we need to look at getting maximum funding. The Executive is sitting again, and we could sweep all policy agendas to see what is most advantageous to hook on to things that are gaining support. The recommendations were agreed. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13: Volunteering 2020+:**  AH gave a presentation and explained that the Volunteering Coordinator had left, but we had not lost our focus. We took the decision to take a step back and see what we had within the Membership Team. We want to do things well-focused and represent and support students in the most effective way. SB was great in the volunteering post in terms of arranging litter pick-ups, beach cleans and the volunteering road show, and had a high volume of work and a system of brokerage that linked well with the rest of the organisation. She advertised posts for students who could find them on the website. She engaged with the University Careers Department, thus working with lots of people on student led projects, so students were motivated to come along. 1 or 2 Societies took it forward, but not a huge amount. We had to have a re-think as she was 1 Volunteering Coordinator who covered 4 campuses with a small volunteering budget. She described the Volunteering Impact Chart saying that activity was high, but impact was low, and we are trying to invert this to get a much greater impact. The GBD comms team are working to identify partners. Linked in the impact reports were how many who know about the EDGE Award. It is a demanding process and there is no concept as to what students are doing. The next 6 months will be a little bit tight. The SA Manager is back, then the 2 SA Coordinators will be doing Societies and Volunteering work over their 2 campuses. The SUSS squad was relaunched in 2019 for groups of students who work over Welcome Week and we are recruiting for the 2nd year. We will choose 2 or 3 external organisations and match them with volunteers. This was launched in Semester 2 and 15/20 volunteers have signed up. The University will look with us at projects where high impact students will get 6-8 hours on to their EDGE Award. This is ready to go on stream in the next couple of weeks and will be built up for the 4 campuses. We can give support to volunteers with recognition and awards. They can log in on-line. If we know the volunteers individually, we can contact them, and they will feel much more part of the UUSU team. Bigger engagement gives bigger impacts. KW felt it was a good presentation. AW asked if there was linked communication. AH replied we could put a volunteering piece on the website and have 1 partner organisation, then change can be seen. CCon suggested doing a video as to how you gained from the experience. AH felt this was a good idea. On-line logbooks could be used which will make processing a lot easier. We can have a permission box which volunteers could tick which allow us to use this. AH reminded that her team looked for photographs every May. We could choose a charity project for a day’s volunteering. Greater impact could really work in setting realistic targets that are sure to attract volunteers. AN suggested that 1-day events could be opened up to Alumni by inviting them along, following up on the idea of focusing on where we can make an impact rather than delivering something, and have evidence of where we made a difference. AMcA agreed this was fantastic and gave scope for a bit of sisterly branding. He suggested lanyards could go alongside it. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 14: Any Other Business:**  CC advised that as RS had resigned, a new Vice Chair needed to be appointed. CC asked for the Board’s preference as to meeting by videoconferencing or face to face in the one room, with Minutes being taken by videoconferencing. The Trustees opinion was also sought on having 2 meetings per year as in person and two via videoconferencing. If the meetings are face to face, some Officers would have to travel. CCh felt face to face meetings would be more constructive, but also acknowledged the limitations of travel time. DL put 3 options forward: Maintain the status quo; hybrid meetings or go all out with face to face meetings. KW felt the hybrid option was achievable. AW agreed with the hybrid model, subject to them being planned. AN agreed if there was nearby parking available but questioned this travel and the environmental policy. One meeting on each campus would be fair. AMcA said that next year there would be a balance. CCass did not mind having to travel. DL felt that this should be considered, and dates will be available for future meetings at the next Board meeting. He added that sub-committees had not worked well in the current formation this year so should be reviewed. | AMcA to send information to Trustees on Vice Chair time commitment. |  |
| **Date of Next Meeting: 27th May 2020**  DL informed the Board that hopefully we might meet prior to then as we have been approached by University Council regarding lunch on 1st May in Magee to which all Trustees have an open invitation. |  |  |