

**Trustee Board Summary Minutes**

**Held on 30th March 2023 Held in Rooms BD-03-019 Belfast, H215 Coleraine and MD122 Magee**

**By Videoconferencing and Microsoft Teams**

**Present: In Attendance:**

Grace Boyle, President (Chair) David Longstaff, Chief Executive Officer

Rebecca Allen, Vice President, Education Colin Campbell, Director of HR & Campus Operations

Robert Millar, Vice President Belfast Clodagh Kennedy, Director of Finance & Business

Ethan Davies, Vice President Coleraine Support

Ashley Neill, Lay Trustee Gavin Boyd, Director of Membership & Comms

Aaron Ward, Lay Trustee Dónall Hegarty, Vice President Magee

Andrea Probets Lay Trustee Chaudhary Hamza Riaz, Vice President Equality &

Antoinette Bradley, Lay Trustee Belonging

Darren Fowler, Lay Trustee Finola Quigg, Vice President Sports & Wellbeing

Sophie Hilditch, Student Trustee Jackie Taggart, Note Taker

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| **Meeting Notes** | **Action** | **Update** |
| **Agenda Item 1:** Welcome by Chair:  The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 2:** Apologies**:** EM  The Chair noted that the VPC will leave the meeting at 5.00 p.m. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 3:** Declaration of Interest:  The Chair noted that there were no declarations. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 4:** Minutes  Minutes of the previous meeting of 26th January 2023 were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 5:** Matters Arising:  Agenda Item 5: Matters Arising: Mental Health Action Plan:  This will be discussed under Agenda Item 11.  Agenda Item 7: CEO’s Report:  The DM&C forwarded the Sutton Trust Report to the Chair. | The Chair to follow up off-line. |  |
| **Agenda Item 6:** Chair’s Communications:  The Chair noted:-  Election Campaigning: Many candidates ran for Faculty and School Reps and Officers’ positions. There had been a good turn-out in voting numbers which had increased on previous year. She thanked everyone who managed the election process, particularly the Student Voice Team.  The Board inquired if engagement in elections had increased and was advised that over the last two years, engagement had decreased due to the Pandemic and had increased thirty-seven percent this year. The Board congratulated UUSU on the significant growth in election engagement and recognised the benefit of Student Voice spending more time promoting the elections in the first semester. The VPC added that Council Elections, which are very under-rated have brilliant engagement in Coleraine specifically and a lot of votes come from Council members’ friends within UUSU which pushes up the voting numbers.  DF offered his services if a focus group/working group/brain-storming session was created.  The Board advised that seeds should be planted through the engagement during Freshers’  activity and Semester One generally and possibly, with Student Council’s assistance, it could  be further and organically promoted throughout the year.   * Conferences: The Executive attended NUS Conference where the Cost-of-Living motion was presented on the national floor, and recommendations were made on apprenticeship wage. The VPB was elected on to the National Scrutiny Committee which is UK wide and deals with accountability of NUS. The Cost of Survival Report at NUS/USI Conference gave the opportunity for students to speak on their experiences on cost of living and comment on our research. USI Conference is next week and will run for three days. She thanked the VPE who has worked tirelessly on an Equality and Belonging event with speaker sessions, which included the VC and the PVCAQ. * SHAG Week: This week is SHAG Week which the VPE also led assisted by the Campaigns Coordinator. Sexual Health Week is going well with 16,000 views on Tik Tok which is good for engagement and feedback. * Cost of Living: We have obtained a total spend figure from the University on mitigations including free breakfasts, wellbeing offers, no charge for graduations and stocking kitchenettes amounting to £1.9 million investment so far. More benefits will potentially be allocated later. The University have not offered a reason as to why it did not make actual cash payments to students, but they are offering services for students to avail of instead. We can explain to members to ensure that they know that this is the University’s decision and UUSU will continue to push the University for cost-of-living payments. * Events:  1. Disability Network: The VPC had set this up for students with additional needs. He explained that this is a network where students with disabilities can link in. 2. HOLI Event: This has been the biggest event in Belfast since Diwali with lots of international students attending. 3. Breast Feeding: The VPC has worked hard on comfort of the spaces and two campuses are already fully equipped.  * Potential Cuts in Education: DfE has advised that they have had budget cuts of 17-19% in 2022/23 with a significant impact on education. The VC is of the opinion that there will be no cuts to places at UU and Ulster accounts are healthy so there should be no significant impact to student numbers. * Colours/LTA: These will be held on 4th and 19th of May respectively and invitations will be sent out shortly. She hoped the Board could attend. * The Strategic Plan and Campus Developments will be covered later under Agenda Item 7. * The Whistleblowing Policy appears later in the Agenda for approval, together with the new meeting format.   The Board commended the great progress that has been made and congratulated the new Officer Team, adding that it is a strong indicator in campaigns as to how well we are engaging. The Chair agreed that the SAAI nominations have shown how much we were able to achieve this year. | The Chair and DM&C to pick up on this.  The DM&C to speak to the SVM about this. |  |
| **Agenda Item 7:** Chief Executive Officer’s Report: Please see Reserved Minutes for further points.  The CEO presented a paper in the new format as previously discussed and gave further information on pertinent points.   * Development of our Spaces: We are continuing to move positively, and investment is being realised in the two current spaces in Coleraine and Belfast. Designs are being drawn up which we will share. Aesthetic developments will make spaces more student focused so they will stay longer on campus. The timescale is tight, but spaces will be ready for August 2023. * Strategy: Some strategic exercises were carried out by the DM&C and it appears from the Coleraine exercise that members are more comfortable interacting in a digital space. Other campuses will be trialled soon and if there is a poor attendance rate the process will need to be reviewed. There was a preference for face-to-face engagement, but a virtual approach may be necessary and facilitated through break-out rooms or visual intelligence spaces. It might mean pushing back on the Task & Finish Groups dates, but updates will be provided once a plan has been agreed. * Reserved Matters:   Please see Reserved Minutes for this Agenda Item.   * Operation Plan Progress: Election figures of overall votes cast are encouraging at 38% of our members and unique voters seeing a rise of 37% on last year’s numbers. The number of votes cast has increased on last year, which is positive, and were assisted by the number of candidates and fantastic throw-back to how elections were held in the past with bed sheets hung over the atrium and posters etc, which was very visual and successful. * Risk Analysis:   Please see Reserved Minutes for this Agenda Item.  The Board queried if there were enough mitigating factors to remove the fifth risk on Internal Comms from the Risk Register due to the successful staff event before Christmas and the DM&C’s appointment, and the CEO advised that this is being monitored. The DM&C added that having staff get togethers more regularly in the form of a drop in through Teams could be trialled and he has ideas to implement integrated comms across Teams. The Board agreed that the risk was being well managed and mitigated.  The Chair spoke on the following two points:   * Whistleblowing Policy: The Chair advised that this Policy had to go to the Board for approval as members of SMT could be implicated/involved. The Policy was approved. * The New Format: The Chair sought the Board’s opinion on the new format which gives other members the opportunity to contribute. The Board felt it is excellent. | The DM&C to report on ideas to the next Board meeting. |  |
| **Agenda Item 8:** Director of Finance & Business Support’s Report:  The DF&BS reported that there are two updates, one being Management Accounts and the other, the SUSS AGM.   * Management Accounts: Due to the frequency of Trustee Board meetings, the most recent accounts were uploaded showing 7 months ended 28th February. Income is as reported at the last meeting, mainly from the block grant which is paid monthly. There are two main categories of expenses, Admin Salaries and Wages and the Sports Union. The Admin Salaries and Wages is under-budget as we have two positions that have not been recruited but will be later in the year. The Sports Union has spent its budget at the end of February and no further payments will come out of the block grant. The Sports Union budget is uniquely ring-fenced. They have external sponsorship from Randox to fund the rest of the year’s spending. Health Sciences move means there are more Clubs in Magee. The projected outturn is £100,000 surplus at the end of the financial year. * SUSS AGM: The Pension Scheme operated historically as a Defined Benefits Scheme which started in the 1980’s and closed in 2011. We have to pay for people who were working in UUSU at that time which is a big commitment to the organisations paying deficits, but we have to honour it. A 60-page presentation is available, and the DF&BS or Secretariat can circulate this on request. Key points on Finances, Covenant and Communication were:-  1. On 30th June 2019 the three-yearly valuation showed a deficit of £140,000,000. 2. On 30th June 2022 there was a decrease in valuation to £133,000,000. 3. The calculation has changed so a more positive plan is in place now to try and lower the deficit with a changed approach. 4. Manchester has left the scheme which has brought down the deficit in general. 5. Pension Trustees have not been pleased with the investment advisors and have changed them. 6. Payments increase in October each year and in the past, these have on occasion risen by 20% after a valuation but this October the increase is the standard inflationary increase of 5% 7. The recovery plan date has been changed from August 2035 to May 2037. This is not a substantial change. 8. Next year our commitment is £295,000 which comes out of the block grant up to 2037 with 5% increase each year.   She added this is a huge cost for the Students’ Union. SUSS plans on selling the scheme to an insurance company when the debt is cleared. There is a Covenant in the form of a questionnaire which is sent out to check the financial stability of all SU members. Feedback shows that some are in a better position than others to pay. The University CF&SO is aware of this. One of the SUSS Trustees could join the November Board meeting and update Trustees and the University CF&SO on how SUSS are proactively trying to reduce the deficit if that was something that Trustees would like.  Transferring out to another scheme is not an option for us because it has to be a stand-alone scheme. The scheme is under-funded and the premium for paying the orphaned pension still has to be paid. Manchester has done this, but they had a stand-alone scheme to move to. Other options in the Presentation will make savings by paying three years in advance. The Pension Regulator is content the deficit will be cleared by 2037.  The Board felt this was a good summary showing that the Pension Scheme is being managed and  Progress is being made. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 9:** Director of Membership & Communications’ Report:  The DM&C had submitted a paper on the results of the survey on strategic direction and gave the following summary:-   * Respondents: There were 762 respondents with 100% completion through the course of the survey which is indicative of a membership that is keen to be involved. This comprised 58% Belfast students, 20% Coleraine and 22% Magee which wasn’t disproportionate as regards location versus student campus numbers. It is heavily slanted towards undergraduates and full-time students. We need to increase numbers of part-time students who are less engaged and the PG Researchers who are not students or staff and find their particular experience so they can be included. 12% of respondents were Academic Reps and 2% Student Council although the majority were not people who had a highly engaged relationship with the Union. * Responses/How UUSU can effectively support students:  1. Events held to make friendship groups. 2. Reflection on a student population who is still emerging from Covid. Studying remotely gave no opportunity to join Clubs or Societies due to restrictions. 3. Social isolation resulting from lockdown is still prevalent. 4. Fewer students staying in bars or on campus as networks are missing. 5. From responses, activities that students want to access through the Union are entirely social. 6. Suggestions for events in student spaces included movie nights, game nights, with 50% based around friendships, not the drinking or partying culture that students have not had the opportunity to develop. 7. There was a good mix in responses as to how students wished to receive communications from UUSU but very much a digital form of communication i.e. all student emails. Currently we are issuing our Newsletter through the University mailing system. There is more desire for visibility through campus screens which proved effective in promoting student elections, Learning and Teaching Awards and SHAG Week activity. We need to discuss with the University as to how we can create more information and use screens as Coleraine and Magee don’t currently have screens.   The DM&C was pleased with the strong responses to the survey, and impressed with responses which gave a clear trend around UUSU presenting opportunities for social connections. The Chair added that student expectations are different now. Cost of living has impacted on students, along with the ability to engage.  The Board felt that this was a good summary on engaging priorities of students, particularly in campaigning, and presents fantastic opportunities. We were not sure that campaigning was visible to all students but clearly it is. It is encouraging that we are focusing on the right things which come out of feedback. We need to show that the £1.9 million is given back to students and they are aware of this. The DM&C explained that what we have been doing is aligned with students’ priorities. UUSU’s priority is to campaign on students’ experience which we are doing, and we have to let them see it. The Board remarked that achievements in the last six months have been fantastic. | The DM&C to present Campus Activity Report at next meeting. |  |
| **Agenda Item 10:** Director of Human Resources & Campus Operation’s Report:  The DHR&CO reported that a lot of work had been done on HR policies since the last Staffing Committee meeting in April 2019. Fourteen Policies needed to be updated in the early part of this year although they were very minor changes such as job titles and updating the Chair of the Board.  Previously Staffing Committee were keen for an overview of absence rates, and these were presented in six-month blocks. He presented a paper on the absence period from September 2022 to February 2023 which was larger due to two long-term absences that were exceptional. The absence figures were not as high as they would have been a few years ago and we have moved away from commercial services. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 11:** Mental Health Action Plan:  The Chair gave the rationale behind the plan. A lot of work has gone into the approach as to how we support mental health during our time as students. Different streams of academic and social events and how students interact with us were reviewed. Last year we had a consultation piece with students who told us what they wanted, and we used data to prepare the report.  The VPS&W gave a breakdown of the Mental Health Action Plan explaining that mental health is equally as important as physical health.  The Board commented that clearly there has been a massive amount of work done and, over the past couple of years students have had, it is more important now than ever. Current students who may only have had one year on campus are being overwhelmed in trying to squash three years into one. Providing students with avenues to get support is very important.  The Board asked how we are going to connect the action plan to students in more bite sized pieces, so we don’t lose the importance of the detail. The VPS&W replied that staff and officers will help on campus and at events. The document is primarily for staff to keep account of what we should be doing and timelines as to when they should be implemented. The SSDOC took on the bulk of the work with the SVM and last year’s VPC.  The DM&C added that the document is to help ourselves accommodate plans and timeline that have been set and agreed. There is a role for Student Council to hold Officers to account for the document. The important part is as to how we connect our commitment to our members in a way that is acceptable and digestible.  The Board agreed that it is important that students realise they are not alone. The Plan needs to be front and centre as we learn how to create connections and different formats to get out there too. We need to hold ourselves to account to deliver it for students. | The current and incoming VPS&W to meet with the Chair regarding next year’s membership. |  |
| **Agenda Item 12:** Reserved Business |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13**. Any Other Business  Please see Reserved Minutes. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 14:** Date of Next Meeting: 25th May 2023. |  |  |