

**Trustee Board Summary Minutes**

**Held on 25th February 2021 at 4.00 p.m. by Microsoft Teams**

**Present: In Attendance:**

Collette Cassidy, 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 Grace Boyle, Vice President (C)

Ashley Neill, Lay Trustee Ryan Harling, Vice President (M)

Shauna Murphy, Vice President, Belfast Gayle Alexander, Boardroom Apprentice

Andrea Probets Lay Trustee Jackie Taggart, Note Taker

Darren Fowler, Lay Trustee Peter Hope, Chief Finance Officer (University)

John Synnott, Student Trustee Nigel Moore, Auditor

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| **Meeting Notes** | **Action** | **Update** |
| **Agenda Item 1: Welcome:** The Chair welcomed everyone to the first meeting of 2021. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 2: Apologies:** CKeen  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 3:** **Declaration of Interest:** There were no declarations. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 4: Starred Items:** CCass noted that there were no starred items, and this item links with the Sub-Committee Minutes detailed in Item 16. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 5: Presentation of Audited Accounts:** NM shared his screen to present and explain the audited accounts which have been prepared in line with charitable requirements and the Financial Memorandum with the University. There are no major issues and NM highlighted the considerations around the balance sheet calculations. Clubs and Societies money that was not spent must be used for them only going forward. Trustees must be aware that they agree there are sufficient resources and the charity has enough funds to keep it operating. The Charity has sufficient resources to remain in operation for the next 12 months and this will be signed by the Trustee who signs the accounts. PH asked if the accounts would be submitted to the Charity Commission and CK confirmed that they will be submitted in April. PH and NM left the meeting. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 6: Minutes:** Actions from Minutes: CCass advised that all actions are being covered in this meeting’s Agenda or have been concluded. Minutes of 26th November 2020 were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 7: Matters Arising:** 1. Student Engagement Update: AH informed that engagement has been good. Student Voice has the same number of Representatives and Student Council’s 3 meetings have been quorate. We have engaged students with issues. Student Societies have low numbers at online events, but these are meaningful. Academic quiz for classes got brilliant feedback so it will continue. The Mental Health Campaign went well. Out of the 90 active Societies, 10 remain very well engaged. Belfast move is an extra compounded issue for sport and uptake. Advice Bureau queries were up by 200% mainly with rental contracts and disciplinaries for breaking Covid rules. Students know that the Advice Bureau is there if they need it. Officers are progressing meetings with Politicians.
2. Task and Finish Group Update: AH advised that AW will speak on this under Item 15 of the Agenda. EDI had a meeting in September. We now have a Task & Finish Group with a strategy in place. It will be going live on the website. Trustee Board offered support if required.
 | AH to keep the Board updated. |  |
| **Agenda Item 8: Chair’s Communication:** CCass reported no changes to the campus arrangements since Semester 1 and that nothing firm has been agreed for next year. We have worked with NUS/USI on a Students Deserve Better campaign with publicly funded education being the long-term goal. We have put out a statement on lobbying work and have met with local Councils about student issues. We have also met with the All-Party Parliamentary Group to lobby on further and higher education and there has been an announcement made from the Department of Health that non-salary qualified student nurses will receive up to £2,000, although other Health Care students have been excluded. Vice Presidents are meeting with Politicians to see how that payment can be expanded to include the include the excluded students. The Department of the Economy announced £37.7 million in funding for students which includes £500 for Covid disruption funding but excluded part time and non-EU students, and £3.45 million for hardship issues. There is a separate fund of £250,000 given to Students’ Unions to roll out mental health initiatives, as well as funding for digital poverty and 12 weeks refunded money for unused accommodation for students. Discussions are being held around logistics as to how the Covid Disruption Grant payments will be made to students. The University has a hardship fund for students that they apply for. Students who have been excluded, part-time and non-EU, leave of absence and expelled make up a lot of groups that we are trying to cover with the £3.45 million. We are seeking clarity on the £250,000 for mental health initiatives and hope for consistency with Queens University that it is spent around the same time. We had a bi-lingual signage policy passed by SU Council in November 2018 for Irish Language signs in the Students’ Union which went into an EQIA assessment working group set up in 2020 and a consultation document was completed. If everything is agreed, it should be rolled out in March for a 12-14 week consultation and a decision subsequently made. Current campaigns are focusing on Equality and Diversity, Mental Health and Sustainability and this is LGBT History month. We are working on a Student Mental Health Action Plan in time for the University meeting on 4th March. | CCass to update on any changes. |  |
| **Agenda Item 9: Chief Executive Officer’s Update:** DL presented a paper and updated that the Executive has again extended the Covid-19 restriction period to cover Easter, with their lock-down exit strategy being announced on Monday. Officers are to be congratulated on the big win of £250,000 which is to be ring-fenced for Students’ Unions. Belfast building is continuing with the proposed moving date of 9th August. SMT have been considering how the move might impact on staff from having a well serviced environment in JN with car parking spaces to the City centre with no parking facilities. We are meeting with relevant Trade Unions to look at how we can best support staff and maintain goodwill. We have confirmation of an extra piece of funding from the University which will help with unanticipated Covid related costs which CK will speak on under Item 14. There is a huge underspend in sports funding which is a large carry-over of ring-fenced funding and we are liaising with the University to ascertain if we can absorb that money into our wider budget with the aim that this would boost our long term sustainability. DL will keep Trustees updated in these conversations. We have set up a Working Group to ascertain our requirements as Sports Services are putting emphasis on us to come up with a proposal as to how clubs could fit in it in the next decade. We have pencilled in May for Sports Services to potentially consult with Trustees. Clubs must remain to be student-led. We have 2 additional legal claims on incidents that had happened within Sports Clubs. The first is where a UU player at a Basketball match elbowed an opposing player who has written to the University trying to put in a personal injury claim. The other is where the Mountaineering Club went on an unsanctioned trip to absail, where one person fell and was badly injured. They have issued proceedings against us and the Club Chairperson. There is a very clear protocol when Clubs organise an event which was not followed here, and lawyers are looking through the information that we have provided. A more detailed report will go to Audit, Risk and Compliance Committee. The report included some matrix around online digital comms for a top-level review of where we are on a month to month basis. A dip in website use is normal in January after the Christmas period with students doing exams, and the same again from May to August. February, March and April should increase to 10,000-15,000 hits. Nominations have closed for elections, with fewer candidates this year. In line with Trustee feedback a more developed quality analytics matrix will be provided in future showing student impact where pertinent engagement is much stronger. Trustee Board thanked DL for providing this as it is useful for reviewing the volume of the strength of the services that we provide to students. We have an engagement tracker through the Advice Bureau which would also be useful to include in any future metrics. Trustees agreed that it gives a good reference to what works well and what type of action/quiz/event drives engagement.  | DL to update on TU meeting at next TBDL to update ARC Committee on legal cases.AH to share some engagement stats and submit quarterly as part of report. |  |
| **Agenda Item 10: Operating Plan Update:**  DL presented the Operating Plan and informed that we are currently on track across the major strands of work and development for this year. Several workstreams have been planned in a pre-planned delivery timeline, developing inductions, review meeting 2021, embed evaluation progress June 2021. Part of that discussion will be how we evaluate our Board effectiveness. Jordanstown will close at the end of 2022 with one school remaining until then, so we will have to maintain some presence in as cost effective a way as possible and have given a costed presentation to the University. We have proposed a knowledge hub where students can drop into, which will be staffed by UUSU one day a week for each service. Commercial Services staff consultation process has closed. CC is working hard on dispersing stock, and equipment will be sold from the Jordanstown campus, but no figures are available yet. The alcohol at Coleraine Bar was sold. Perishable stock was sent to foodbanks and charities. Coleraine Club as a legal entity is closed and there is debt carried across which we need to resolve. CK will speak on this under Item 14. Tendering of commercial services is about to go live. UUSU will sit on the Review and Selection Panel which is pertinent to the issues that students need to be factored into it. An activity strategy has been drafted. Sports strategy is red/amber due to concerns that there does not seem to be ultimate clarity or a time-line attached to any operational proposal at this current time. We need to ensure that any change is in our best interests and achievable in the timeline that we put forward. University Sports Services understand that things cannot necessarily be neatly aligned and put in place by July 2021. We may need to spend 12 months on the implementation of the operations and want to use the next 3 months consulting with the clubs. There was still an interest in attracting Officer nominations but a reticence of members in not knowing what 2021/22 will bring. Engagement in the Advice Bureau has spiked from March/April last year. We have aggregated leave in hours as opposed to days due to working patterns and shorter hours on Fridays. The website tenders closed and the panel met on Tuesday to discuss them. There is a clear winner who will be communicated to on Friday. Student Council has been restructured and Officer roles will be reviewed before their terms end. We are working through the Task & Finish Group and the Business Continuity Plan will be presented this year and then owned by Audit, Risk & Compliance Committee. He asked Trustees if future updates should be marked in red. Trustee Board felt that it was useful to be directed by DL as he wishes and he should be commended for the long report that represents the work that is being done and strikes a balance in making it more digestible. It focuses on the things that the Board can support the Students’ Union on or make the Board aware of things that are going on. The Students’ Union has done a lot of work in the last month. Officers should be commended for the progress that continues to be made. This is different to some organisations where Covid is used to explain what people have not achieved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 11: Central Risk Register:** DL informed that updates were in red text and reiterated the substantive ones. Sports Review goes hand in hand with the bigger picture of access, particularly about the move from Jordanstown to Belfast. We have set up an Internal UUSU Working Group to work on a proposal to give us more control. We have also added in a risk around operations, in terms of the transition to Belfast creating staff discomfort. We do understand that any change cycle can be challenging for staff but feel we are managing proactively as SMT is engaging with Trade Unions and will notify staff. A Park & Ride from Jordanstown for UU staff will remain open for at least another year.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 12: Flexible Working Policy:** DL reminded the Board of the Flexible Opportunities Policy. Due to Covid working there are potentially several requests that may be escalated to Staffing Committee and we could add flexibility to the policy to ease this, one is a direct change to the policy and one to give delegation to SMT to make decisions. When people return to the office, we pre-empt a few requests for flexible working, so there should be a statement circulated to promote discussions with their Director where they could work remotely one day per week. The Membership Team is the biggest so everyone in the team could not work from home every Friday for example so we would have to maintain a process. He asked that the Trustees give autonomy to SMT to manage so that there would not be a detriment to service on campus, but we were able to offer flexibility. The 2nd part is that we previously had a generous career break which offered staff up to 3 years sabbatical and a senior staff member was awarded this which exposed unjustifiable weight on other senior staff to provide cover. We now have 8 weeks as a maximum, but in lieu of Covid and work-life balance considerations we could consider a middle ground and have a year in duration. SMT should be able to approve Grade 5 or below, while Grade 6 or above would go to Trustees for approval. Where a Manager applies, it would have to go to the Trustees as it is taking a more advanced component out of the organisation. Trustees were asked to approve that SMT offer a one-day flexible working arrangement per week to staff when we get back on campus, and to approve the change to career breaks which covers up to a year with the caveats on grading vs decision-making. Trustees queried how an 8 week career break was managed and were informed that it was generally absorbed elsewhere. Trustees felt that 8 weeks could be more problematic as a person could not be employed to cover 8 weeks, but someone could be employed for 1 year which makes us a better employer and we retain better staff. Fixed term contracts would be easier to manage. They queried if there was a set application period and the parameters pertaining to the policy were explained. Trustees pointed out that someone who requested a career break might need it for something completely unforeseen so could this be considered in an emergency. The requests were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13: Whistleblowing Policy:** DL presented the policy for annual review by the Board. To guard against potential conflict for a staff member AW is the external contact for anyone who would feel that DL or CCass would have a vested interest in their whistleblowing. This was approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 14: Management Accounts:** CK shared her screen to show the accounts for 6 months ending 31st January. There was a slight amendment based on discussions with PH. Expenditure is less than expected because of less activity, but the cost of closing commercial services and getting rid of stock meant some unforeseen costs have been accrued. Legal and Consultancy have costs in relation to sport. Bad debt provision relates to Coleraine Club and costs of winding the Club up legally. Profit & Loss is where we sold 3 vehicles, making a surplus of £5,000. We anticipate standard activity for the rest of the year. Marketing sponsorship will not have much change. We had an insurance award for disruption of service. The Balance Sheet shows that there is not a big movement overall. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 15: Comms – Task & Finish Group Update:** AW advised that we are using the opportunity to step back and look at the totality of engagement and communications to understand what we are currently saying. We need to look at other organisations to identify whether we are doing well and gage areas where we need to improve upon to bring them forward into the future. Over the course of this Working Group there will be 6 meetings between January and May and we will present strategic analysis and articulate a direction as to where we want to go. We will be able to assess, analyse and plot for the future. We have had 2 meetings, one earlier today. There is energy behind it and great ideas also.  | AW to report at the Annual Board meeting. |  |
| **Agenda Item 16: Sub-Committee Minutes:** Sub-Committee Minutes were not discussed. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 17: Any Other Business:** There was no other business. |  |  |
| **Date of Next Meeting:**  27th May 2021  |  |  |