

O1Board of the Trustees

17-9-20

Action

1 ATTENDANCE

1.1 Present

Tanya Curry (Lay trustee), Richard Halderthay (Lay trustee), Riya Gadhavi (Officer trustee), Teresa Jordan (Lay trustee), Emily Long (Officer trustee), Fatima Lakhani (Officer trustee), Avinash Miriyam (Officer trustee and Chair), Jason Snowdon (Lay trustee), Nick Worrall (Lay trustee)

In Attendance

Linda Collett (Minute taker), Bethan Dudas (Advocacy & Engagement Director (A&ED)), John Valerkou (CEO)

1.2 Apologies

Omkar Singh (Officer trustee)

1.3 Absent

None

1.4 Declaration of interest

None

2 ACCEPTANCE OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

2.1 Accuracy

The previous Minutes were accepted as a true record.

2.2 Matters Arising

15 – The Chair of the Finance and Risk (F&R) committee had started the process of adding ARU London to the risk register.

17.1 – Discussion on setting up of a new sub-committee would be on the agenda for the Appointments and Governance (A&G) meeting on 16 October.

3 ITEMS FOR APPROVAL/DISCUSSION

3.1 Dormant trading company accounts 2019-20

The Chair of the F&R committee noted that there had been no accounting activity in the dormant trading company for the year 2019-20, and that there had been no changes since the previous year. The Board **APPROVED** the proposal that the dormant trading company accounts be agreed and signed.

3.2 Strategy update including agreeing mission and values

It was noted that conversations had taken place with Board members, staff and officers over the summer and all the feedback had been considered and drawn together to produce the final version of the new strategy. Every effort had been made to ensure that the language used was plain, simple and to the point.

The Board agreed that the final version was easy to understand whilst using emotive and aspirational language. It was further agreed that the implications for the Board and how it works would be discussed at the next A&G committee meeting on 16 October.

The vision and mission statement were **APPROVED**.

It was noted that the work done over the summer had enabled the senior management team (SMT) to hone down on what the Union should concentrate, and that it was hoped that this would result in more constructive connection between teams. The Board was requested to give guidance and steer on how best to deliver and measure the progress of the strategy and on what activity the Board would like to receive updates and reports.

It was noted that the current staff structure of a combined communications and insight role was unable to deliver adequate data analysis, due to the lack of both staffing hours and experience. It had been agreed that these were two completely different roles and so it would be impossible to recruit a combined role successfully. The preferred option would be to outsource this function but there were insufficient funds in the budget to do this.

The appointment of a Project Manager would be the first step towards creating a project team who would support managers and staff in delivering the strategy. It had also been hoped to introduce a project management tool in order to improve cross-team collaboration and efficiency, but this had also been removed from the budget for 2020-21 due to the financial uncertainty as a result of the pandemic.

The Board expressed its desire to support the Union in moving forward in the delivery of the strategy and although the financial year 2019-20 ended in a better position than predicted, largely due to the government furlough scheme, which had resulted in a higher reserves figure, it was hesitant to make any investment until the future landscape became clearer. A commitment had been made to review the budget in January 2021. It was noted that the budget had been set with maintaining headcounts as a priority: any additional spend would need to be balanced by cuts elsewhere, but as the block grant had been frozen for four years, this would be extremely difficult.

Several of the Board expressed their reservations about the appointment of a Strategic Projects Manager, and queried the value of such an appointment, citing that managers could be provided with basic project management skills. It was noted that the Union had not been effective in ending and reviewing projects nor in deciding what the next project would be, so it was hoped that the Project Manager would assist in a culture change for the Union, reduce the amount of silo working and assist in making the Union more project-based using student insight.

The role would be responsible for measuring and evaluating the progress of the projects in order to demonstrate their impact and keep track of the cost both financially and in time. It would also free up staff time to concentrate on student-led projects. It was noted that each project should

link to one of the strategy pillars, and identify KPIs – ideally only 1-3 per project. It was further noted that data collection needed to be improved and that there needed to be a balance between project and process.

The Board agreed that any budget decisions would be postponed until January 2020 and that the SMT would decide how to manage the team and budget spend until then.

3.3 Changes to bye laws

The changes to bye laws 3, 6 and 7 were **APPROVED**.

It was noted that the change to bye law 7 would entail a review and change to the membership of the sub committees. This would be discussed with the relevant Chairs outside of this meeting.

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4 STANDING ITEMS

4.1 Officers' updates

The officers gave updates on their campaigns and took questions from the Board.

VP HEMS

There were no questions.

VP AHSS

It was noted that the VP AHSS had started to hold drop in sessions for students on Instagram with the option to have a 1:2:1 session for anything of a confidential nature. The Board congratulated the VP AHSS on her imaginative use of different platforms to engage with students.

VP S&E

There were no questions.

President

The Board queried whether there was some duplication of work between the President and the VP AHSS but it was confirmed that any potential overlap had been discussed and identified and that they were working collaboratively.

VP B&L

The President requested that any questions on the report should be emailed directly to the VP B&L.

The President confirmed that the officers were discussing their different ideas but that they were working well as a team.

The Board requested that the officers' verbal update at the next meeting be simply their top three actions.

Officers

4.2 Chief Executive's report

The CEO noted that, following consultation with PHE, all indoor face to face freshers' events had been cancelled.

The Board asked if additional grant would be available for London in the light of its huge growth in student numbers. The CEO noted that there may be a possibility of additional funding but

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that decisions would be needed on how best to spend this.

It was further noted that an interim payment had been made by the Union's insurers in respect of a rebate and the Covid claim. It was hoped that this may indicate that the claim may be upheld.

4.3 Financial report

It was noted that the Union was in a reasonably healthy financial position largely due to the government furlough scheme, which would provide a cushion in the event of future downturns.

It was further noted that a large proportion of the cash flow was societies' funds and would be carried over to next year. The GP margins had dropped, mainly due to the disposal of perishables, but that overall the accounts were balanced fairly well.

4.4 To receive minutes of the sub committees

- **Appointments and Governance**

No meeting since the last Board meeting.

- **Finance and Risk**

2 September 2020

It was noted that the committee now had a new commercial expert, whose experience and expertise were already being utilised.

The main focus of the meeting had been risk and there had been detailed discussion around clarifying terms and ensuring that nothing could be taken out of context. Reporting on risk required a process that was robust and sustainable and so in future, two reports would be brought to the Board: one on the risks with the highest scores and one on the current top ten risks.

Reducing the delivery of service had been discussed as part of the commercial update.

A major disappointment had been that the University had not moved forward on granting the Union access to the commitments ledger, which meant that currently the financial data was not meaningful. A consultancy was needed to undertake additional work to make this happen and the CEO had been actioned to move this forward before the November meeting of the F&R committee. It had now been confirmed that the Union would not be expected to bear the cost of the consultancy.

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Finally discussions had taken place regarding completion of previous officer campaigns. It had been agreed that the Board should be aware of any gaps and that any incomplete campaigns that were not carried forward should be conscious de-couplings.

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- **HR and Employee Engagement**

The main points from the meeting were:

KPIs – Labour turnover was currently down to 8%, possibly partly due to the lockdown.

Exit interviews for staff that had left had all indicated that the reasons for leaving were all from positive choice, to further careers, personal development or change of career

direction.

Sickness had also reduced, possibly due to most staff working from home and less likely to call in sick. Most previous sickness had been due to mental health issues, but the main contributor to this had now left the Union by mutual agreement. The Chair of the HR&EE committee stressed the importance of keeping on top of mental health issues and congratulated the staff team for the reduction in the amount of sickness and the work done on keeping the figures down.

The HR & People Manager was working on the HR strategy under the “Belonging” strand of the main strategy.

The return to campus working group had met regularly and some staff were now returning to campus which had been made Covid-safe. Work continued in supporting those staff unable to return, and on ensuring sufficient office cover was available on a daily basis. Live chat function software had now been purchased to enable 8.00 am – 8.00 pm availability. The shop in Cambridge would also be opening from 8.00 am – 8.00 pm. However, the University reception would continue to close at 5.00 pm and several University front-facing departments were only opening from 11.00 am – 3.00 pm.

5 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION OR TO NOTE

5.1 To note report from interim Executive meetings

It was noted that at the Executive meeting on 6 August, the VP S&E had been elected as Deputy President. It was further noted that officers had all received chair training to encourage members into the conversation, and that engagement had shown a great improvement on last year. This was largely due to the work done by the Democracy and Campaigns Co-ordinator who was thanked for her efforts.

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The Executive had also approved campaigns’ budgets of £40 per member and a budget for the purchase of 250 sunflower lanyards for the hidden disabilities’ campaign. The Board suggested that consideration be given to making the campaigns’ budgets dependent on members’ attendance at the meetings. It was agreed that this would be discussed at the next Executive meeting.

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5.2 Buddying update

All lay trustees had now met online with their officer trustee buddy and all concerned agreed that the system was useful and beneficial.

5.3 ARU London – 5 year plan

It was noted that there were likely to be governance issues brought to the Board for approval in February 2021. The report was noted and the Board anticipated further developments with interest. It was requested that the ARU London manager be given positive feedback on a well-written report.

BD

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 3 December 2020 – 2.00-5.00 pm – via Zoom

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81828920314?pwd=a1ZLLzJDMHpmRzlvME1ZcGphcVZrdz09>



Signature

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PositionChair.....

Date:03/12/2020