

04 Board of the Trustees

18-6-20

Action

19 ATTENDANCE

19.1 Present

Amanda Campbell-White (Officer trustee), Mary Copsey (Officer trustee), Tanya Curry (Lay trustee), Richard Halderthay (Lay trustee), Matt Hayes, (Officer trustee and Chair), Teresa Jordan (Lay trustee), Fraser Luther-Yarwood (Officer trustee), Jason Snowdon (Lay trustee), Nick Worrall (Lay trustee)

Observers

Riya Gadhavi (VP HEMS elect), Fatima Lakhani (VP AHSS elect), Emily Long (VP S&E elect), Avinash Miriyam (President elect), Omkar Singh (VP B&L elect)

In Attendance

Linda Collett (Minute taker), Bethan Dudas (Advocacy & Engagement Director (A&ED)), Jo Harbrow (Activities & Operations Director (A&OD)), John Valerkou (CEO), Caroline Way (Advice Service Manager – Item 21 only)

19.2 Apologies

None

19.3 Absent

None

19.4 Declaration of interest

All salaried staff declared an interest in item 22.1

Introductions were made for the benefit of the incoming officers.

20 ACCEPTANCE OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

20.1 Accuracy

Item 15 – Spotlight session, London.

Paragraph two should be amended to read:

“It was noted that ARU London was a profit making organisation and that decisions were made from a business point of view: often very quickly and without consultation. The London co-ordinator explained that students in London did not have individual logins to the IT systems which posed an information security issue. It was noted that the Students’ Union was flagging the potential reputational risk to the University. The President would raise the issue at the Student Matters committee.”

The previous Minutes were accepted as a true record.

20.2 Matters Arising

- 8.2 – Actions for anyone not present at the meeting were being communicated to the relevant person.
- 8.2 – The Chair and the VP AHSS had planned to meet but this had been cancelled due to the pandemic.
- 8.2 – The officer induction working group were discussing the buddying system and would share the resulting guidelines once they were finalised. The scheme had also been explained to the new officers. BD
- 10.4 – Subsequent Executive meetings had failed to reach quorum so the proposed changes had not been agreed. The President had included details of the work already completed in his handover document and would continue to lobby for the changes in his future role as Faculty rep.
- 15 – The President had not taken the issue of reputational risk on the London campus to Student Matters. This action would be reassigned to the A&ED who would ascertain from the VP London if this was still an issue. BD
- 15 – The action to seek clarification regarding implications for corporation tax and VAT of ARU London to be reassigned to the CEO. CEO to forward details to the Chair of the Finance and Risk (F&R) committee before the next meeting in September. JV
- 15 – The addition of ARU London to the risk register would be reviewed at the next F&R committee meeting. TJ
- 17.1 – It was noted that the current lay trustee who sat on the F&R committee was a commercial expert, but that, in order to gain additional commercial expertise, it had been suggested that one of the committee experts from the HR and Employee Engagement (HR&EE) committee be asked if she would be willing to sit on the F&R committee as well. JV
- A discussion took place regarding the possibility of setting up an additional sub-committee to assist with the commercial operation, leaving the F&R committee to focus on general finance, oversight and risk. As setting up a new sub-committee would entail a change to the bye-laws, it was agreed that, as the commercial operation would be in a dormant phase at least for trimester one, action would be deferred to the CEO to discuss the purpose and governance of such a group at the next round of sub-committees. JV
- In the meantime the focus would be to control spend and reduce costs in the commercial operation. JV/JHH
- 17.3 – The situation regarding the faith society had slowed due to the pandemic, but the A&OD had met with police who had confirmed that they were unable to take any action. A meeting had also taken place with the local pastor and so far the society had not reformed. The situation would continue to be monitored, particularly in the event of the society reforming in the next academic year. JHH
- 17.3 – The President had discussed the possibility of banking and finance skills sessions with the Volunteering team who had indicated that they would be focussing on soft skills sessions and so were not planning to include any banking and finance sessions.
- 17.3 – The President and the CEO had reviewed the cycle of business for the HR&EE committee.

- 18.1 – A date had been set to discuss strategy development but the call had not taken place.
- 18.3 – The recruitment policy had been amended to reflect the changes made to the feedback process for senior management positions.
- 18.6 – The brainstorm on developing the Executive committee had not taken place.

21 SPOTLIGHT – ADVICE

The Advice Service manager delivered a presentation and took questions from the Board.

She confirmed that the all-female advice team did not seem to pose a problem to male students and that the balance of female/male clients roughly reflected the demographic of the University. She went on to say that, historically there had been very few male applicants for adviser vacancies, but that it was hoped that the balance might be redressed in future.

She explained that there were seasonal trends in the type of cases but that the figures were similar year on year.

The current focus for the team was to be more visible on campus and to make the content of the web page less text-heavy and more engaging and user friendly.

22 ITEMS FOR APPROVAL/DISCUSSION

22.1 Budget 2020-21

It was noted that the budget proposals had been discussed by the F&R committee.

As the University had not yet finalised their budget, the amount of grant had still to be confirmed. Therefore, as the Union's budget could not be agreed, a series of budget proposals had been modelled for consideration.

The final grant figure would depend on the number of students recruited for the next academic year, so a zero cost of living rise in August had been proposed, with a review to take place after Christmas. It had been agreed that the message to staff would be to retain as many jobs as possible. Discussions were currently being held over staff contracts and whether incremental rises would need to be paid. The Chair of the HR&EE committee agreed to assist with this.

JV/NW

Some costs such as the external insight provider and the project management software had been taken out of the budget and consideration was being given to employing commercial staff on a term time only basis. However, the SMT indicated that they felt the insight provider and the project management software were crucial to be able to evaluate the strategy and drive the Union forward. The Board indicated that prudence and caution were needed due to the uncertainty of the financial future, so expenditure would need to be prioritised and any additional spend would need to be balanced by making cuts elsewhere in the budget.

JV

22.2 Risk appetite statement and top ten risks

It was noted that the risk appetite statement and risk register had been discussed by the F&R committee. The risk appetite statement had been written so that it was easy for students to

read and understand and that every effort had been made to ensure that it was clear and simple.

Concern was expressed that the top ten risks seemed overly operational and Covid-specific but it was noted that the document which had been presented to the Board was a snapshot of the current top risks. The full risk register would be fully reviewed at every meeting of the F&R committee and a one page document outlining strategic risk to the Union had yet to be developed. As there were some formatting errors it was agreed that all members would send their feedback to the CEO who would make the relevant amends. A strategic piece would also be taken to the next F&R committee.

JV
All
JV

STRATEGY WORKSHOP

The CEO made a presentation on the development of the new strategy to date. It was agreed that as there was a lot of content to consider, a further meeting would be arranged at the beginning of July to discuss the strategy, mission and values.

JV/LC

23 STANDING ITEMS

23.1 Chief Executive report

The CEO explained that his report was a summary of what the Union had done since lockdown.
HR issues

The organisation had tried to be more communicative with regular email updates, town halls and weekly stand-ups. Staff had come through a period of lassitude and had now moved on and were largely adapting to the new norm.

Financial operations

All trading and income had ceased at the start of lockdown. As the commercial operation had not been performing well, the reduction in associated costs, along with the assistance of the furlough scheme had improved the forecast and the organisation was now forecast to make a small surplus at the end of the year.

University financial forecast

The University had prepared three different financial scenarios, with predicted losses of between £9k and £39k dependent on student numbers for the forthcoming year. They were currently working on the middle ground scenario of a £19k loss, which was likely to result in a grant freeze for the Union for 2020-21.

However, the University had been very successful in diversifying its income and growing as a regional University representing the whole of the east of England, with income streams from the Metropolitan police, Home Counties police and the new campus at Peterborough all recently being confirmed.

The Board expressed some caution regarding the University's diversification as this could have the potential to dilute the reputation of the courses provided; and that the SU presence at the associated groups could impact on the workload of the SU. However it was noted that the presence of the SU at University groups was to insure that the student voice was at the

forefront and central to new developments rather than to take on additional workload. It was agreed that it was important the ARU Students' Union should be seen as a good quality union in a good quality university.

Effect on the HE sector

The pandemic had severely affected the level of recruitment for the HE sector as prospective students were questioning the level of student experience and quality of teaching that might be on offer. ARU would be offering blended or wholly online teaching and although it was first thought that many students would choose the latter, indications were now that most students may choose the blended option, so the Union was now looking at providing more face to face welcome activities than previously expected.

Relationship with the University

The pandemic situation had resulted in the University more fully recognising the importance of the Students' Union and the relationship between the two was now much stronger. The SU now had a presence on and input into many more University groups.

Events

The Made a Difference awards had taken place on 12 June via a Zoom Watchalong. It was noted that the Vice Chancellor had spoken very highly of the SU at the awards event and had extended his thanks and congratulations to officers and SU staff, both for putting on the event and for the way in which they worked in partnership with the University, whilst challenging them along the way.

Southern conference

ARU Students' Union had hosted the Southern conference as part of the bid to raise its own profile nationally. A lot of very positive feedback, both about the organisation and content of the event, had been received from other unions that had taken part. It was noted that, in future, the Union would be seeking to increase the amount of cross team projects as these had produced excellent results.

The Board commended the amount of work undertaken by the CEO and senior managers and thanked the CEO for his leadership under such difficult circumstances. It was noted that students' unions had come together to support each other and that ARU Students' Union was performing better than many other unions. Lay trustees also offered their support to the Senior Management Team (SMT) going forward.

23.2 Financial report

It was noted that the report had been discussed by the F&R committee on 4 June.

Cash flow was healthy and the Union was now forecast to make a small surplus of £46k at the end of the year, mainly due to the reduction of the cost of commercial activities which had been closed due to the pandemic and the savings made on payroll by utilising the government furlough scheme. The surplus would be used to increase reserves in order to protect the Union's finances whilst entering the uncertainty of post-Covid.

Although it was noted that ARU Students' Union was in a better position than many other unions, the Chair of the F&R committee urged a note of caution as there were still some

unknowns up to year end.

23.3 To receive minutes of the sub committees

The minutes were taken as read.

- **Appointments and Governance (A&G)**

The Chair of the committee noted that the situation regarding student trustee recruitment was frustrating. Repeated efforts had been made to contact the student that had already been recruited but these had been unsuccessful. Further recruitment was now at the forefront of the agenda with diversity being key to ensure that the Board included voices from marginalised backgrounds.

JV/BD

There had been a robust discussion around committee experts and it had been agreed that the CEO would carry out exploratory conversations with the support of the Chair of the committee to review the expectation of the experts in their role and how these were being met. It was imperative that the role definition and term of office was made clear to all current and potential experts and that there was no conflict of interest in the use of their expertise. It was further noted that lay trustees should also be given the opportunity to reflect on their roles.

CEO

JV

The Board effectiveness review was an ongoing project.

New officers would decide which sub-committees they would attend and would be buddied with the relevant Chair. The president would be buddied with the deputy Chair of the Board. Outgoing officers had been asked to reflect on their term as trustees: this was an item on the Board agenda.

JV/BD

It was noted that the project bids for the redevelopment of the IT infrastructure had not been taken forward due to the University financial constraints. RH confirmed that he was happy to support the development of the digital roadmap and it was agreed to consider setting up a digital sub-committee at the next meeting of the A&G committee.

LC

Finally it was noted that a system for monitoring attendance at Board and sub-committee meetings had been set up and that two non-attendances would trigger a discussion with the trustee or expert concerned to establish whether the timing of meetings continued to suit their other commitments.

- **Finance and Risk (F&R)**

The Chair of the committee explained that people, operations and their impact on numbers were discussed at the committee, alongside the numbers themselves.

It was confirmed that the SUSS pension was closed to new members. The fund had performed well since the last valuation in 2016, but liability had also increased. A 5% increase in repayments had already been planned from October 2020, but as a result of

the 7% pension increase issue, the deficit had increased and so further increases in payments would be necessary. Greater additional liability would be attributable to students' unions who had members affected by the 7% pension increase, but as ARU Students' Union had no members thus affected, the increase to them would be smaller: 5% from October 2020, 8% from October 2021 and 5% from October 2022.

There had again been an option to make an upfront payment for the three years but as this had only showed a saving of £6k, and as the future financial situation was unsure, it had been decided to continue making monthly payments.

It was confirmed that, as the 92 outlet was only likely to offer a takeaway service, at least during semester one, this would negate the need for chefs, and so some commercial staff may not return from furlough. Negotiations were currently underway with the University regarding the use of current SU staff in the University catering department.

JV

Finally, condolences were offered to the committee expert on the recent loss of her father to Covid-19.

LC/JV

- **HR and Employee Engagement**

Conversations had been held with the HR and People Operations manager regarding the furlough process and it was noted that this had been managed very well.

Whilst there had been a significant drop in satisfaction in the staff engagement survey since last year, and there were some issues that needed to be addressed, it was noted that the level of engagement in the previous year's survey had been extremely high following the appointment of the new CEO and that this would be difficult to maintain year on year. It was further noted that performance management for the officers should be discussed by the A&G committee at their next meeting.

LC

It was noted that the exit procedure for the Commercial Services manager had been very well managed and that the CEO had been supported by the employment law committee expert.

23.4 End of year update on campaigns from officers and their reflections on being trustees

The Board noted that officers had achieved a huge amount in their year of office and had benefitted enormously from the experience. Their reports gave a lot of insight and real life experiences which could be used to improve processes in the future.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION OR TO NOTE

24.1 Insurance update

A meeting had taken place with the insurers to discuss the possibility of a claim for the loss of business due to the pandemic, and the level of cover available for the future. A claim had been submitted for loss of business and it was anticipated that there may also be a rebate for activities which had not taken place.

24.2 To note report from interim Executive meetings

The minutes from the interim Executive meetings were noted along with disappointment on the poor attendance at the meeting.

25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

25.1 Black Lives Matter

The Board enquired whether the Union had made a statement on the Black Lives Matter movement. The president agreed to circulate the statement that had been posted on the website.

MH

25.2 Officer trustees

The Board extended its thanks to the outgoing officers for their input and wished them well for the future. A welcome was also extended to the incoming officers.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 17 September – 2.00-5.00 pm

Signature M. Ah

Position president and chair of trustee board

Date: 18/09/2020