

Board of Trustees Minutes

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16:30-19:30 | 19th October 2021 | Student Common Room, Tait Building

Members	Initials	Meeting 1 19.10.21	Meeting 2 25.01.22	Meeting 3 05.04.22	Meeting 4 07.06.22	Meeting 5 TBC
Shaima Dallali (President) (Chair)	SD	✓				
Ruqaiyah Javaid (VP Education)	RJ	✓				
Shahd Haj Khalil (VP Community and Wellbeing)	SK	A				
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓				
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	AL	✓				
Clare Searle (Lay Trustee)	CS	A				
Rumnique Gill (Lay Trustee)	RG	✓				
Liz Williams (Lay Trustee)	LW	✓				
Ibrahim Hamid (Student Trustee)	IH	✓				
Vacant (Student Trustee)	-	N/M				

Key: "✓" = Present, "A" = Apologies given, "N/M" = Non-member, "P" = Partial attendance, 'X' = Non-attendance

Included in the circulation	Initials	Reason and Meeting Section
Philip Gilks	PG	Chief Executive (Company Secretary)
Hannah Roberts	HR	Deputy Chief Executive
Margaret O'Donnell	MO	Head of Finance
Aadam Ali	AA	Clerk

Informal

Guest Speaker: Professor Anthony Finkelstein- City President

The Board received a presentation from Professor Finkelstein (AF) who gave insight into City's new mission, and strategy on being distinctive, aligned, and self-confident with increased risk. However, he felt City has not taken sufficient risks in the past therefore are not coming across as edgy or audacious. AF is keen to foster enterprise and entrepreneurship at City and is keen to work with the Union and its strategy.

- NR thanked AF for his presentation and enquired about what success would look like, despite the higher education sector being weighed down in heavy metrics. AF said this would be when City is wholly aligned to delivery and having a distinctive identity which is recognised externally.
- RG asked about City's mental health and counselling as he felt this was challenging during the pandemic in the sector. AF acknowledged the need for culturally aware and specialist counselling. AF will enable City to have the best online services and face to face support.
- AL enquired about risk and the need to operate with this level. AF responded saying that at present there are structural inefficiencies in the current strategy and wants to experiment with more and different programmes, whilst making City more fun.

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from SK and CS. SD welcomed LW as the new Lay Trustee and AA as the Board's Clerk.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Paper: BT2101)

- NR added a new declaration as he has been appointed to UCAS as a member of their council.
- LW's declarations will be added to the register after receiving via email.
- IH will abstain from item 18 as this concerns Sabbatical Officer Salary which he could run for.

3. Minutes and Actions

3.1 The Board **approved** the Minutes of the meeting held 24th May 2021. LW abstained from the vote as she was not present in the meeting. (Paper: BT2102M)

3.2 The Board **noted** the Matters Arising (Paper: BT2103A), noting the following:

- Staff salary review discussion to be moved later in the academic year and suggested to be kept under review.
- SD will contact the Jewish Society asking if they still would like to pursue their complaint, given the relationship between the Union and the society has improved under the new leadership.

4. Decisions taken between meetings

The only decision made was the new agenda format which was approved by Trustees to be used at this meeting.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

The Chair unstarred item 20 in Section F for discussion as requested by RJ.

Section A – Update from the Chief Executive and Strategic Progress

6. Chief Executive Report

(Paper: BT2104)

The Board considered the Chief Executive report, which included updates on key projects, recruitment and staff matters. In the discussion PG highlighted:

- That recruitment is particularly difficult in the sector presently, as not enough high calibre candidates are applying. The Union received zero applications for the Head of Finance role therefore will be going out to an external agency.
- The Union has lost two members of staff in Student Activities which is shown in the revised staff structure.
- He has started his Trusteeship at De Montfort Students' Union.
- That staff have returned to being 60% or more on campus (3 days a week). Services and engagement numbers have returned to pre-COVID levels. The Board recognised the need for the onsite presence of student facing staff and sabbatical officers to increase further.
- Staff generally feel valued and have given positive feedback on working for the Union.
- Welcome Week was challenging due to staff members leaving the organisation. The Union has completed pre-welcome check-ins with students and have exceeded expectations for event attendance, with 1482 ticket sales and 2611 Welcome Fair attendees.
- The new Student Common Room has been very successful, in contrast to when it was used by staff.

- The Union achieved excellent in the Green Impact Students' Union award and tied with most improved Union.
- Work is continuing to develop a reimagined student bar. The Union hopes it would be able to manage the space long term but not the alcohol operation.

The Board **noted** the report and suggested the following:

- To look at Women on Boards for recruitment for the Head of Finance role. PG noted this and clarified that the Union pays competitively and that due to the joint contracts the Union uses HR approved recruitment agencies.
- The Union should celebrate its success in the Green Impact award on social media. LW keen to hear more on sustainability and management of the buildings.
- To look at CitySport and look at how to work together collaboratively and improve the experience.
- To continue to speak with staff about returning to work. This will be good for morale judging by feedback from staff.

7. Strategy

(Paper: BT2105)

PG took the strategy update report and financial guidance plan as read by Trustees but highlighted the following:

- The operations plan presented has more substantial changes which need to be reviewed.
- Different stakeholders fed in at different points hence PG sending a tracked change version.
- At the Trustee away day, it became clear that alumni and enterprise will become more dominant about what it means in the strategy.
- Proposed he would bring the operations plan to the Trustees twice a year as the strategy evolves.

Decision

The Board **approved** the revised operations plan and **noted** the strategy update.

8. Democracy review

(Paper: BT2106)

The Board received a report outlining the proposed changes in more detail and HR and PG presented the democracy review rationale and key changes, including:

- Current democratic structures are outdated and follows a traditional Students' Union.
- Work was done by an external researcher studying a PhD in democracy who looked at local, City and participatory democracy.
- The structures must fit the needs of members. This analysis comprised of three stages: i) assessing current structures, ii) measuring against different democratic structures such as EU models and other students' union models and iii) Surveying and conducting focus groups with students. This allowed the current proposal to be moulded.
- A key change is the proposal is to have a fourth Sabbatical Officer and to move to a non-portfolio structure. The Officer with the most votes via single transferable vote would have the option to be the President of the Union.
- The new structures will support students with other commitments and job shares.
- The proposed structure replaces the Student Members' Meeting, Student Council and Executive Committee with a single larger 50 member Assembly. The Sabbatical Officers will be responsible for putting the assembly's agenda into action.
- Due to proposed changes to the School structure at City, the exact numbers for Assembly Members from each School will not be defined in the bye-laws, but the wording will be able to be adaptive to the University's changes. This will allow for proportional representation and the flexibility to enable this.

- This new structure will move away from policy, which is often not fully formed or acted upon, to priorities. Priorities will be set and developed by the Assembly in full day workshop style meetings.
- The changes are proposing to pay Assembly Members to attend meetings over the weekend to reimburse and thank them for their participation.
- In line with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Board must approve the proposal for it to be sent out for consultation with students. After this, any amendments will then need to be acknowledged by the Trustee Board and sent again to a Student Members' Meeting. The Board will then need a company law meeting in December to approve these changes.

Board members raised the following:

- Concern on how the average student would input into this meeting as it felt the Assembly could be seen to be acting as the gatekeepers of democracy.
- Requested further details on how the non-portfolio profiles would work for Student Officers how their roles would work with their manifesto pledges.

HR addressed the first concern saying that the new system will be more open and transparent and assembly members will be able to bring forward their own ideas. This will form a wider participatory piece. The aim is to change the culture and move away from policy towards priority. Offered to send wider democracy review to Trustees that would like to see this.

PG addressed the other concern mentioning Greenwich SU as using this model effectively and others such as Liverpool SU. In terms of manifesto pledges, these would be divided up amongst the team, and would allow slates to run deciding on their preferences. PG concluded that if the Board have any further questions, that they can be sent to him or SD via email.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Democracy Review proposal so it could be consulted on with students.

Section B - Student Insight

9. Sabb Spotlight

SD presented on her progress since the last meeting and highlighted the following points:

- From July, SD has been involved in supporting the induction of SK as the new VP Community and Wellbeing. SD has also been involved with campaign and Executive training.
- Work has been done on building relationships with the University and other stakeholders including the President and Senior Leadership Team. AF holds monthly breakfast meetings, and she updates on the Unions progress.
- Anticipating structural changes and the expansion of different schools and name changes. The question will be how this effects students and how the Union operates.
- SD has had internal conversations on the UCU strike and is deciding on what stance to take. SD has also met with City HR and is investigating how prepared the University is and what their response will be and how this will affect the student experience.

RJ presented on her progress since the last meeting and highlighted the following points:

- RJ is working on Programme Rep training. The elections will now be taking place in person. Promotional material is being created with short statements to drive engagement.

- RJ has been representing first year students and their timetabling and course concerns at committee meetings.
- Work has been also done on decolonising City and is looking at access and resources.
- RJ is holding regular meetings with the Deans of each school in school links meetings.

Although SK sent their apologies, SD and RJ highlighted the following from their presentation:

- SK has been campaign planning including Black History Month and decolonising City.
- SK has been involved in planning and delivering Society introductions and establishing a portfolio with each society.
- SK has worked with individuals from Sports and the City bar.

The Board commented with the following:

- Asked what the Unions formal position is with the UCU strikes. SD said she is balancing priorities as she knows students have suffered through the pandemic and final year students have had the worst experience as they have been through two strikes. Sense is that students would prefer to avoid disruption but is consulting with students currently. RJ added that that it is very difficult because the intention is to be as disruptive as possible. The Board advised the officers to go back to schools and see what they are prepared to do to mitigate the strikes.
- SD updated the Board that the relationship with the University is good overall, but it is still too early to say with the new SLT.

10. Pre-Welcome Check-ins 2021 Report

(Paper: BT2107)

The Board **noted** the report which HR took as read, but highlighted the following:

- The Union ran check-ins twice pre-Welcome Week.
- The project was funded by the University and was an ambition to call every new student coming to City. Overall, it was a great success using student-staff to call them in a packed room.
- Students were keen to return to in person teaching and to be on campus as they had mostly completed their A-Levels online. There were concerns about making friends and having diminished social skills. Students overall don't want to wear masks on campus.

Section C – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

11. EDI Committee

RG gave a verbal update on the EDI Committee which the Board **noted**. He said that the Committee hadn't met since the last Board meeting, but the next one is scheduled for the 22nd November 2021. Is hopeful to reinvigorate the Committee which wasn't well attended. There were some vacant staff memberships for the committee which have been filled.

Section D – Finance

12. Management Accounts

(Paper: BT2108)

MO presented the management accounts for period 1- August 2021 which the Board **noted** for information. Headlines included:

- The Union is up £23,000 on income which will be reconciled with £23,000 expenditure on Welcome Week, therefore The Union will be on budget.
- Pay costs are down due to staff changes but will be balanced with temporary staff costs.

- The Union previously stored some of its reserves in a 95 day account to gain some interest, but this has now changed to a 35 day account so is not so beneficial. Alternative options are going to be explored.
- Reserves could be put into a fixed-term one year account. MO will follow up and send an update to the Board. **[Action]**
- Shops doing well, will be down because of cutting margins and having no staffing costs, but will still maintain the bottom line.

13. Year End 2020/2021 Provisional (Confidential) (Paper: BT2109)

Overall, the Union underspent significantly therefore a large portion of money can be used as expenditure in the 2021/22 financial year. The Union had budgeted £35,000 from the restricted reserves for the Student Common Room but the University paid for this. This must be spent on societies; therefore the team have been earmarked to look at projects to spend this on. The shop income was worse than expected but has had little effect on the bottom line. Staffing costs are £17,000 less due to staff turnover.

AL thanked MO for item 12 and 13 and the Board **noted** the update for information. PG also noted that MO has agreed to stay on until someone has been appointed to her role.

Section E - Starred items for approval

14. Health and Safety Policy (Paper: BT2110)

This item remained starred so was not discussed.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Health and Safety Policy.

15. Risk Management Policy (Paper: BT2111)

This item remained starred so was not discussed.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Risk Management Policy.

16. Data Protection Policy (Paper: BT2112)

This item remained starred so was not discussed.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Data Protection Policy.

17. Trustee Code of Conduct (Paper: BT2113)

This item remained starred so was not discussed.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Trustee Code of Conduct.

18. Sabbatical Officer Salary (Paper: BT2114)

This item remained starred so was not discussed.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Sabbatical Officer Salary paper. IH abstained from voting.

Section F - Starred items for information

19. Executive Committee Summary

(Paper: BT2115)

This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

20. Union Advice Report

(Paper: BT2116)

HR took the report as read which was **noted** by the Board but highlighted the following from the report:

- Most students prefer an online appointment which could give an impression of the future of the advice service. Some students do still prefer face to face appointments, therefore when staff are in the office, they will be able to facilitate both.
- The advice service has felt busy but is difficult to compare with 2019 statistics, so the comparison is not very accurate.

Section G – Other

21. Any Other Business

- i) IH enquired about the Student Trustee recruitment process. PG updated that 35 applications had been received and HR and SD will be shortlisting tomorrow. Applications have been anonymised. PG commented that this level of engagement is excellent, and a new Student Trustee will be appointed in two weeks.
- ii) PG confirmed for the Board that the Autumn elections will be going ahead, and a lot of nominations had been received. The nomination period was extended by a week due to data issues and for fairness. Voting will take place on the first week of November.
- iii) SD asked for feedback on the new agenda format. Trustees gave the following feedback:
 - Found the meeting to be well structured.
 - The starred and unstarred items will need to be embedded.
 - Trustees did feel that the timings felt rushed in this meeting as they wanted more time to discuss the Democracy paper. PG commented that the agenda was timed but didn't see this as fully necessary as the meetings rarely run over two hours.
 - AL suggested that financial items shouldn't be towards the end of the meeting.
 - NR suggested the Board could have less, but bigger items to improve timings. SD was advised she could move the agenda items if she felt necessary e.g. Democracy proposal could have been discussed first.
- iv) IH asked for some time with PG for Student Trustees to go through the papers.

[Action]
- v) The Board expressed interest in having the presenter in the informal section to be given by someone working with mental health in the University or someone currently involved in staffing changes and the restructuring of the schools as this is becoming a concern.

22. Trustees Only Business

All staff left the meeting, and this section of the meeting has no minutes.

Date of the next meeting: 25th January 2022

Board Clerk: Adam Ali