Cambridge University Students’ Union Trustee Board

Meeting of: CUSU Trustee Board

Location: CUSU Offices, 17 Mill Lane

Date/Time: 25th November 2016, 09:00-11:00

In Attendance: Trustees: Chair, Amatey Doku (AD); Péter Juhász (PJ); Audrey Sebatindira (AS); Roberta Huldisch (RH); Éireann Attridge (EA); Alex Bols (AB); Gareth Marlow (GM).

Apologies: Page Nyame-Satterthwaite (PNS).

Invitees in attendance: Mark McCormack (MM).

1. Apologies - Page Nyame-Satterthwaite.

2. Conflicts of interest - GM currently working in theoretical physics dept.; GM proposed that the role did not represent immediate conflict as basis of role sufficiently distant from workings of CUSU, but brought to attention nonetheless. Board resolved to proceed without immediate concern.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Matters Arising: Minutes of July meeting approved.

Matters Arising: Student & External Trustee Recruitment.

- AD updated on previous decisions made by Board to proceed with filling vacant student member positions on CUSU’s Board. Outlined ensuing process and confirmed appointment of Peter and Page. Drivers for decision-making related to the qualification of applicants’ experience and range of skills and experiences provide by both candidates collectively. Positions had been ratified by CUSU Council. Peter brought experience in University (via soc syndicate) and Page had experience of being a trustee elsewhere.

- Board instructed MM to move forward with a recruitment process for external member trustees, engaging at least two sabbatical officers in the process (TBD outside of the meeting).

- MM updated on previous process undertaken for recruitment of External Member trustees in 2013. Board resolved to seek external trustee candidates with the same criteria as those sought in 2013 with one additional requirement: to seek experience in finance and fundraising as a priority.

- Board assented to a proposal by PJ to recruit more external member trustees should future constitutional amendments allow.

Matters Arising: Independent Audit of 2015-16 financial year. Tendering for new providers had been delayed due to limited capacity over the summer months;
audit timescale would run end of Dec to end of March with tender process deferred to following year, to be instigated in January.

4. Starring and ordering or items for decision/discussion; deferring of items until next Board.
Discussion item iv)brought forward: The Cambridge Student (TCS), print editions

i) The Cambridge Student (TCS), print editions
AD introduced item. TCS had brought a proposal to utilise their current budget allocation to produce more print editions of the paper: a smaller print-run, with editions printed each fortnight during term-time. AD supported the item and TCS volunteers had met with AD and CUSU staff regarding their proposal.

Good relations had been established between the TCS editors and CUSU team since the new term, and the paper’s volunteers had been supported in producing further print editions beyond the initial Freshers edition. Board reviewed the decision made in April 2016 to reduce the budget allocation of the paper; Board stressed the main drivers underpinning this decision, namely that staff time could not be diverted into the management of the paper, costs would need to be carefully considered as sales volume reduces through the academic year, and any advertising offering provided by the paper to external clients should not act against any ongoing business strategies for other advertising products. Board also warned against volunteers being unduly burdened with fundraising activity.

MM updated Board further on discussions with volunteers so far; outlined the support CUSU could give to the paper and how; and outlined the different fundraising options that could be configured to assist the paper to be sustainable.

AD added that the term’s editors had been excellent in post, constructive and good to work with; both editors and AD had suggested the setting of expectations for future editors regards to editors and staff. ACTION: MM to work with TCS on constitution review in this regard in the New Year.

RH proposed recommending to TCS that a future volunteer post could stay on for a whole year with more of a strategic role; this was welcomed by Board.

Board approved the proposal for TCS to continue printing within current budget allocation or beyond if fundraising activities allowed, pending the production of an expectations agreement between the paper’s volunteer board and CUSU.

5. Organisation Updates
MM provided an overview of the Union’s organisational affairs; of note were:
• Elected Officers had experienced a busy handover and induction period, with officers attending training with the National Union of Students (NUS).
• CUSU had recruited a number of new posts into vacant positions, welcoming Irina Bobeica, Louisa Taylor, Jana Harkabusova and Jennifer Payne into the organisation.
• Freshers was considered a success, with many thousands of students attending and hard work in preparation and at the event from across the organisation.
• Good turnout had been achieved in Faculty Rep elections (in comparison with previous years), and another popular referendum into the union’s position on Class Lists.

MM thanked the staff team for their hard work over the summer that had led to a successful academic year thus far, and thanked the officer team for their continued support.

MM introduced the management accounts and reported that the University had yet to transfer funds for a staff position that resulted in some negative variance due to this being expected in August; MM commented that the funds were imminent and there was no cause for concern. MM informed the Board of a potential overspend due to occur. CUSU were yet to pay the year’s affiliation fee to NUS due to concern over changes to the invoiced fee: during the NUS Referendum NUS published CUSU’s fee as £250; yet this had since been recalculated as £5,765.

MM suggested there would be a need to review how income and expenditure were budgeted across each month of the year by the end of the current financial year; current projections of how each budget-line performs in-year are informed by an average of previous years’ income and expenditure up to end of 2015.

AD updated on the ongoing ‘affiliation fees’ proposals. PJ initiated a Board discussion on how affiliation fees are related to students’ perceptions of value of the union’s work. The Board discussed how CUSU had fewer staff positions to support its work than most unions, yet CUSU could improve how most students understood the extent to which these roles contributed to the overall value of the union. PJ suggested that the manner in which staffing support costs were shown in CUSU’s accounts could be clearer to students, such as by allocating support costs to the specific areas of the Union to which they support and add value, as opposed to simply allocating these costs as overheads.

The Board resolved to ensure that impact reports to the membership were re-instigated; termly impact reports were seen as a helpful way for members to learn about the union’s work on their behalf, a further mechanism for members to hold their union to account and contribute to future agendas, as well as a helpful tool for promoting involvement in the union and widening the impact of its work.
ACTION: MM to bring back the end-of-term impact reports.

7. Items for Discussion.

i) **CUSU’s new Constitution**

MM introduced the item; Board members had been provided with a draft from CUSU’s nominated legal advisors. MM explained the draft was created with a view to have formal, legal necessities in place so that further consultation could then occur with the Council’s Union Development Team.

MM explained the current constitution was considered unfit for purpose and CUSU has committed to implementing the NUS Model Constitution (in unincorporated form). The current constitution also included ‘difficult’ or unprecedented clauses, such as specific clauses on finances (such as not permitting the Union to budget for a loss in a financial year).

The purpose of a charity constitution is to define purpose of the students’ union and powers of its responsible agents/agencies. The current constitution contains many operational or ‘lower-level’ orders that do not relate to the purpose of a constitutional document (e.g. in regards to Charity Commission expectations on what a constitution should include). The aims of the new constitutional document were to provide flexibility. Rather than students frequently changing the Constitution, the aims of the review exercise were to create a governing document that would enable change to occur more readily (and without constitutional change).

The draft constitution required further approvals from different sets of stakeholders before the draft could be taken to the membership for consideration and vote. The Union was hoping to have the draft ready for a vote by the membership in time for CUSU’s Lent elections, subject to the approval of the University.

Board assented to the draft and requested it continue along its approval timeline. Board identified that student trustees be approved by Council in any new constitution draft.

ii) **Legal status of ‘Major Union Offices’ and officer elections**

MM updated on continued correspondence with CUSU’s nominated lawyers on the legal status of elected officers with constituencies within the all-student body, with particular reference to the status of ‘Major Union’ offices in the Sabbatical Team. The University had agreed to minute a reference to an agreed interpretation of ‘major union office’ for the purposes of the Education Act 1994; and CUSU’s current elections processes would be revised where necessary in order to be clearer to students.
iii) Planning Round process for University funds, 2016
Board were provided with a copy of the union’s bid for administered funds to the University’s annual budget process. Board commended Jennifer Payne on the paper.

AOB: Board asked of the status of employment contracts in the organisation; MM agreed to report back by next meeting (or first meeting in New Year depending on timescales).

End of meeting.