

<b>Meeting of:</b>	CUSU Trustee Board
<b>Location:</b>	CUSUs New Offices, 17 Mill Lane
<b>Date and Time:</b>	8 December 2015, 18:00-20:30
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Priscilla Mensah (PM) (Chair), Robert Cashman (RC) Helena Blair (HB), Gareth Marlow (GM), Charlotte Chorley (CC), Jon Wall (JWa), Alex Bols (AB).
<b>Apologies:</b>	Poppy Ellis Logan, William Mark (absent)
<b>Staff:</b>	Mark McCormack (MM) and Jemma Stewart (JS)
<b>Others:</b>	Emily Pye (Minutes)

### Board Administration:

#### 1. Apologies for absence

Poppy Ellis Logan sent apologies.

William Mark was absent.

#### 2. Conflicts of Interest

MM declared a conflict of interest for all salaried board members when discussing automatic pension enrolment.

#### 3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Decision: The Board approved the minutes of the last meeting as correct.

### Organisation Updates:

#### 4i. Staffing and Operations Update

MM gave overview

- Staff welfare and work culture has improved.
- There will be a review on the 18<sup>th</sup> of December to discuss how staff members are working together and how colleagues can be best supported.
- CUSU is still not advertising for the commercial services manager (see accounts for details).

#### 4ii. Management Accounts

MM gave overview:

- Generally the accounts give an indication that CUSU is performing to budget up until start of Michaelmas. It is important not to be too complacent as much of the success is due to provision of university funds. CUSU is also heading into a period (i.e.

accounting period due to delay in financial information) of low income and important income streams such as sponsorship and social media are down.

- CUSU is currently working on cash flow analysis. MM is working with the business team to develop strategy. This should help CUSU respond to the income downturn in Lent term.
- CUSU is currently pushing to have the funds for the commercial services manager paid to the Union directly. This would mean that the position would be an employee of CUSU rather than the University. This would be far less bureaucratic and would give CUSU more control and options in terms of staffing. Confirmation of this should come through by 15<sup>th</sup> December and the post will be advertised after then. MM is focusing on business to make sure we don't suffer financially and we are gaining ground by planning for the year ahead.

### For Decisions:

#### **5. Pensions Auto-enrolment at CUSU**

MM gave an overview of the situation

- Legal changes stipulate that CUSU will have to introduce automatic pensions for all members of staff over the age of 21 unless they chose to opt out.
- In principle CUSU has secured university funds to allow for an increase in salaries to support pension requirements. Another bid will need to be submitted to confirm this.
- MM outlined suggestions for pension provider- People's Pension. This suggestion was based on CUSU relevant criteria including experience providing pensions for charities and working with a transient and young workforce. This scheme offers a good balance between service to employees and employer protection.

Risks:

- Balancing business diligence with employee satisfaction with the scheme.
- Not meeting legal requirements on time (1<sup>st</sup> July 2016)

Actions:

- MM to look into pension providers used by other SUs (requested by GM). There has not been much talk of this in the management network.
- MM to investigate precise costs for CUSU regarding key potential providers. (Requested by AB)
- MM to check options for unenrolment as this is likely to be attractive for many CUSU employees.
- Board to discuss options following MM's update in January meeting.

- The board was unanimous that CUSU does not want to manage its own scheme as the risks are too great.

## **6. Committing fund to the Lounge Space**

MM gave overview:

- The current state of the lounge is very poor especially the kitchen. The University has provided funds for the lift but the rest is very much in CUSU's hands. The request for funds was left out of the funding bid to the university as it was made clear that no money would be given.
- CUSU believes that refurbishment of the lounge is worth the financial risk and has outlined a rough budget. Caveat: The proposal for funds and budget has been put together on very limited knowledge. This will need more scoping before being discussed and voted on by the CUSU Council on January 18<sup>th</sup> 2015. Council agreement is necessary for expenditure of more than £20,000.
- The GU has suggested they will also contribute funds but to manage risk it is currently being assumed that CUSU will be funding this individually.

Risks:

- Funding of the renovation is potentially financially dangerous. There is no real guidance as to how many funds should be kept in reserves. Currently the assumption is 60% of staffing costs. This needs to be clarified.
- P&L impact- A clearer idea of the end of year deficit is needed before the board can take an informed decision on this.
- AB raised the issue of how long CUSU is likely to be based in this building as this will impact whether the investment is justified.

Actions:

- MM to get firm contribution figures from the GU.
- MM to arrange for clearer cost estimations to be established before the next board.

## **For Discussion:**

## **7. Graduate Representation Review and relationship with the Graduate Union**

PM gave overview of CUSU's graduate representation proposal:

- Despite lack of clarity on the brief from the University Council, PM worked closely with staff to compile information on Graduate representation (What grads want from representation, if they feel they should be treated differently etc.) CUSU was

careful to avoid an overly aggressive pitch but made it clear that CUSU supports the idea of a single student union with a graduate officer.

- The diverse panel chaired by Graham Virgo responded positively to the presentation.
- The GU will have the chance to present their case in January. This has been delayed due to the lack of president in the GU.

#### Risks

- Financial difficulties of the GU may become a problem for CUSU if the unions were merged. CUSU would expect the University to provide legal advice and perhaps a due diligence exercise regarding financial arrangements.
- GM expressed concern about alienating the GU by making this about CUSU winning rather than the best representation for graduate students.
- Consideration needs to be given to how student representation would operate if the GU did cease to exist.
- Graduate students may oppose a single union. It is important to show that any merger would not be a CUSU takeover but a combining of institutions. CUSU might have to make some concessions e.g. accepting a joint president rather than a vice president.

#### Actions

- Officers to initiate meetings with GU President in the new year to discuss joint aims for graduate representation. It would be good if we could be on the same page in terms of graduate representation.
- Board to consider the option of a joint board meeting with the GU (proposed by GM).
- AB suggested undertaking some joint research with the GU into what graduate students want from representation
- CUSU aims to have a more open and positive relationship with the GU, to rebuild trust and foster good relations.
- CUSU will continue to respect the GU as an independent institution until a decision is made by the university.

### **8. Board View on proposal for Disabled Students Elected Officer and Referendum**

JS gave overview:

- The Disabled Students' Campaign has submitted a petition with 400 signatures calling for a referendum on introducing a disabled students' sabbatical officer.

- As the petition looks likely to have at least 350 legitimate signatures, CUSU is constitutionally obliged to hold a referendum within 21 term days on the subject. Quoracy is 10% of the student body.

### Risks

This referendum presents substantial risks for CUSU. Board discussed how the organisation could continue to support an additional elected role, and that there was some concern over the practical implementation of the role within CUSU's current structure, inclusive of funds, constitutional framework, its representative areas and in how the Union supports individuals and officer teams each year.

- CUSU is required to produce material for both sides of the campaign. The DSC will clearly campaign for a 'yes' response. This puts CUSU in a very difficult position as actively campaigning for a 'no' vote on an office for disabled students is morally questionable.
- The referendum has been initiated without any consideration of CUSU resources. There are not currently the funds to support another sabbatical officer.
- What is the implication in terms of representation of other minority groups? Board is in favour of having a sabbatical officer to support all the autonomous campaigns but this is not financially viable at the moment.
- In the event of a quorate yes vote, CUSU might simply not be able to find the funds to make the change. This would lead to stagnation and loss of confidence in the Union's democratic processes.
- GM raised concern over a viable pipeline of candidates for this role? It may be that some years only one or no candidates will stand for this role. This would have democratic implications.
- Providing administrative staff to support this role could stretch CUSU's capacity and so plans would need to be considered to ensure any officer could be successful as with the current team.
- The CUSU board does have the power to block a referendum if it is deemed to be damaging to the Union, yet this could damage relationships with members, in particular the DSC campaign and campaigners.
- The election committee cannot be seen to be partisan on this issue.

### Actions

- The board is not willing at this stage to block the referendum. There were some merits to ensuring campaigners had considered all options available to them, such may involve work on alternative models of representation for disabled students.
- CUSU will attempt to initiate talks with the DSC to inform them of the financial and structural barriers to this proposal.

- CUSU will also prepare to run a no campaign on the basis that this is financially and structurally unviable rather than raising any ideological objections to the proposal.
- CUSU is pessimistic about the chance of gaining university funds to support this role.
- In the event of a positive quorate result in the referendum the board may have to stall the implementation of a DSO until financial and structural considerations can be addressed. This is a final resort and should be undertaken with care as overturning a legitimate referendum is a risk.
- CUSU board to consider the future structure of the union. This is complicated by the unclear situation with the graduate union. Currently it is felt that more representative roles could only be sustained with an extended full time support staff.
- RC also highlighted the opportunities behind this referendum and cited the introduction of a women's officer and access and funding officer through similar referenda in the 1990s.

Any other business:

CUSU is currently playing a waiting game on a number of important issues. The January meeting will cover a number of important topics and opportunities:

- Prevent duty
- Potential union merger
- Affiliation fees
- Block grants
- Publications
- New building renovation
- Staffing

**End of meeting**