

Roehampton Students' Union

Trustee Board

Meeting held on 5th December 2022 held in the Chancellor's Meeting Room and Microsoft Teams at 5pm.

Present:

Harrison Cohen (Chair)

Sharon Azams

Mushtaq Ismail

Lee Bird

Siobhan Kelly

Eleanor Wheal

Nicholas Leggett

In attendance:

Mark Gillespie (RSU Chief Executive)

Jonathan Chien (Designated UoR Financial Accountant)

Aysha Nasir (External Secretary)

1) Welcome and apologies

No apologies were received

2) Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest

3) Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4) Chair's report

Council meeting

Officers unanimously voted to support strikes. So far 3 days of strike action. Articles have been posted on SU website and FAQ's. Similarly done on our social media. Met with university leadership, but there was some confusion from senior management. The university were surprised that the SU posted in support of the strikes and that there was not enough balance in communicating the employer's view. HC has compiled a list of unions that have been vocal on strike action.

Teaching excellence framework – HC is the student lead. Currently in the drafting stage. Aiming to have it completed by end of December – deadline 13th Jan 2023.

Student Senate – first student senate of the year has been held and went well. Invite was slightly last minute, but on the whole went well and we team was well prepared. Agenda

setting session was held to get a balance of agenda items for student update section. Eleven points were raised.

Update from Speak Week – Officers have been clear that if students want to provide feedback on the strike to not use speak week but to use the digital rep platform. Data from this should be available soon.

Plan for the New Year – Exciting refreshers' plans with mixture of events. It's important to note our changing demographic, we are 50:50 PG and UG and a large proportion is south Asian, but we want to improve engagement from these groups and attendance at our events.

MI: We've also had this conversation with Julian Kennedy (Director of Student Life), but there hasn't been much of an onboarding process which has led to a little bit of segregation. I've received a lot of complaints on both sides. Segregation on campus and in classes, not integrating well. He said that they're hoping for improvements for the January in take, but it looks like changes may be seen sometime in the Spring. They have admitted that they are paying catch up

Discussion:

NL: What pressures have you put on the university during the strikes?

HC: Impacted assignments have been mitigated or moved by a few days and any salary not paid to the lecturers and professors has been moved to the student hardship fund.

Officers have not received a single complaint from students regarding the strikes. The effects have been miniscule for students here.

MI: I've received feedback from a couple students, but they were all supportive at their lecturers striking.

HC handover to SA for update

SA has been working on these 4 things:

Accessibility – we've been doing campus walkabouts to see what improvements should be made as we have had multiple complaints from wheelchair users. Support for disability international students as they are not entitled to DSA.

Emergency SUC Proposal Results – Students want an adjustment policy and to be notified when their courses drop in attendance or flagged as vulnerable. After discussions with Steven Driver and we've discussed potentially starting a quality assurance campaign to assure students they will be protected amidst these changes.

Costs of living - Have advertised to students what we have available support wise, but also looking at what other unions have done that can be applied to RSU e.g., student pantry, breakfast club, looking at the prices of our food for students. Queues for microwave during lunch times where there is a large proportion of students, the line is incredibly long. Maybe more microwaves can be provided. A lot of students don't know where the microwaves are.

Representation – Taken as read.

NL: Might be useful to get in touch with Trussell Trust (Wandsworth) – to set up a referral or food vouchers

Action: Produce more comms and advertise the campus kitchens and places students can reheat their food

5) CEO report

MG presented the report as read.

Regarding the HR Policy Review we need a new staff handbook. Engaged with a couple external providers for this, HR qualifications are lacking in the senior management team at RSU. Engaged with some external firms in the meantime for support. Timeline will be put forward in the new year for how RSU will review this mapping against current legislation and where moving forward our staff changes moving forward are relevant, up to date, and easy to use.

Visa sponsorship. There is a member of staff who needs sponsorship renewal in the next year and we can't use the universities sponsorships licence. We can either look at getting the sponsorship licence or letting the employee know that we can't go forward with their sponsorships. Scanning the rest of the sector for precedent but we can't find one. Currently in contact with an external HR that the university uses. This might be a potential problem down the road, but currently it is only affecting one employee.

Student officers are doing their 360 appraisals for them to gain feedback from their peers, trustees and students and staff teams they work with in the university to aid them in the remainder of their terms.

We have committed to setting up working groups which tackle cost of living, environmental sustainability, and diversity and inclusion. Hopefully will be finalised in the new year in the hopes of providing employees with a voice for initiatives and contribute to decisions being made at their workplace.

UEB Presentations. MG been invited termly to provide a summary update on our operations moving forward to the university. Purpose is to provide update on operational and strategic objectives, to discuss termly issues as they arise and to improve communication with key senior people at the university which may help with collaborations moving forward. We've managed to secure funding for pay offered to student staff. University has offered to subsidies to bring their pay up to the 2022 living wage rate.

Trustee induction and recruitment. We are in the processing of inducting one more trustee, but we've not yet received her request to act. She may have extended herself a little too far taking on positions across universities

We are recruiting one undergraduate and postgraduate trustee and have applications for both. Siobhan to review applications in the coming weeks and have them ready for the SUC in the new year.

Lastly, every year we shut down operations to a skeleton service during the Christmas break. The team has worked very hard over the academic year to deliver the range of services functions that we offer to students during a rapidly changing environment. We are instead of university in scaling down services from the 21st of December and resuming on the 3rd of January. MG sits on the university's Gold incident management group, if there was

a situation affecting the student population, MG will be drafted in to sit on meeting to help coordinate the response.

Discussion

LB: We need a consistent approach towards visas. It's a very high bar to get a visa sponsorship licence and he doesn't think RSU meets it. We should be prepared for that member of staff not being a member of staff once their visa runs out.

HC: On the student trustee recruitment, we shouldn't delay the process too long. If she's agreed but is now being slow in confirming, we might need to put a time limit and then we can either offer to the second person or put through another election.

EW: She needs to commit but their full interests aren't being represented here. Are there any points in the byelaws preventing this?

MG: It's vague on that but if the first was to withdraw then there would still be mandate for the second person – it was roughly 15 votes between 1 and 2nd

Action: CEO and Chair to meet with the trustee to see where she is at which would then impact us giving it to the number two choice or running another election. Let her know that she has until end of the term for the decision

6) SUC report

HC presented the report from the SUC report. Motion passed proposal on UCU strikes. We've recently elected a new Trans student officer and most recently seen our Trans officer who has recently stood in two elections posts and won. Policy proposal 'No More Other' has been taken to student senate and has been passed. The officers are now working with university management on the particular issues on gender identity. We have also elected students to the Student Executive Committee and RSU Election Committee.

MG: SUC and trustee board hasn't always had the most contact. The minutes are uploaded to the website, with parts redacted. This is more for them to note, rather than discuss. It is to ensure the SUC is aware of the trustee board and what business is being discussed to.

It was noted that there has been practice of closed room board if the need has arisen.

7) Q1 Management Accounts

MG presented. At the end of the first quarter there is confirmation of 612k block grant figure, paid to us in November, February and April in 3 instalments to coincide with some of our big events, such as Hive. The funds have been approved but haven't reached us yet in terms of cash. Still waiting for money from Student Senate as well as funding for the Bar standard intervention scheme. Both have been approved, MG not concerned that we won't receive the money. There is enough to keep us operational in the next few months. There has been a higher turnover in our finance team which has slowed down a few things.

We have secured more funding from university for TEF (6k) as well as receiving 7k for minimum wage and 10k for refreshers, a total of 23k will be given.

Expenditure: Our pay costs are the majority of our costs for the quarter (with just over 141k) with student staff is slightly under budget for the quarter.

The percentage margin likely to be the same for quarter 2, one member of staff is leaving this week, which will present a small saving as there will be a delay to onboarding of new staff.

We have a small running efficiency of 7%, looking to maintain for the course of the year. For non-pay at the end of quarter 1, quite a large amount was spent, but when levelled out across the cost of the four quarters, we should be within 2% margin. For example, quarter 1 pays for freshers' week which account for a higher % as there more expenditure.

Balance from last time checked is 238k, with the majority of the money being from the block grant.

8) Progress against selected Strategy KPIs

MG taken as read and presented the strategy as a future issue. Mapped what the SU has done operationally against 13 selected KPIs inclusivity, support and student etc. We aren't in a position to test the progress against the objectives but we can do so in 2023 through feedback from students through surveys, the university agreeing to run our data against their outcomes so we can see any co-relations, and our outcomes, such as, continuation and success.

This could provide the basis for the annual report, draft to be prepared over the next month.

Highlights to note

Student voice: We have achieved a 20-25% turnout in elections in March, with 50% of election races are competitive. We are struggling to recruit programme reps, which was raised with the university. There have been some strategic changes in the university, so may take some time for these changes to be implemented.

Development co-creation – we are hearing from the vast majority of students that the skills they have gained will help them develop transferrable skills as student leaders moving forward.

Participation (relates to the inclusivity and belonging KPI): We are seeing 1 in 8 students being involved in societies. That percentage of students have also been driving environmental sustainability. Students have come into contact with the Roehampton project and we are confident that students know that that is a part of what we do. Though we do need to test this one and to test that they feel our spaces are safe and inclusive. Incidents at our events are dropping at a positive rate when comparing to the 2019/2020 year and 2018/2019.

Across societies, there is a significant upward trend of society members sitting. There is a lot more students participating in societies compared to last many years. The Roehampton project has had a great impact as well especially when looking at the run a number of sessions and supported volunteers.

We have a new case management system in place, before it was a manual system. We also have increased the number of inquiries and number of open cases. Crucially we have much better data about what students are coming from, what they are coming for and how much time taken for cases to be resolved.

9) Governance & Democracy Review

Taken as read.

The Chair gave a verbal update relating to the strategic plan written in the context paragraph about ensuring democracy is more inclusive.

In 2023, we will need to review our articles of association, last reviewed 2018 and according to those articles they need to be reviewed every five years. This is a project in itself but a sizeable chunk is to look at democracy, look at the roles, process through which students participate in making decisions and set policy. This needs support to be done to a high standard, alongside an oversight group that will steer the governance review which we will be discussing soon. Paper attached outlines context and the plan of what the project might look like at the different stages and how to modernise our democratic structures, with external consultancy support. We haven't put in a hard proposal yet, we would like to take the view of the board on how we might go about that.

There are a couple of options, one of which we've identified as the preferred option which is cheaper and provides us with a more flexible way of gaining support for the consultation and review process. Quote is £4,050 and money on top for incentives are 5k. Funding is still being looked at, whether entirely or with some support from the university.

What activity would need to be dropped if RSU were to fund in ourselves? MG is thinking about this currently. We may need to rethink money contributed towards the school reps and societies, grant fund, or within our membership services. The risk of asking the university to cover the cost would be that it opens that door for them wanting to take ownership. Preference is to be the authors of our own consultancy or at most a contribution.

LB: A governance review shouldn't cost too much, and we need to give the university assurances that they have been looked at and reviewed which should get us by another five years. Concern that we end up paying a consultant who is proposing something that will earn them more money. I think the scope of the project of a democracy review should be limited to the byelaws that affect the assurance that we give to the university. I don't think we should get into a full-scale democracy review for the sake of it.

EW: I think we could gain support from consultants helping with change in student demographics, I approve going ahead with a focus on engagement but not with the amending words in our articles.

Point raised by NL. This is university with a history of the four colleges, what would be the role of the collegiate system in this university system and does this need to be tweaked within our representation.

The collegiate system is not what it used to be and there used to be an identity with their college. Things have changed with the academic schools and less activities between the colleges. However, the point was raised that this year in particular officers have seen a lot of pride from students for their individual colleges. Such as the rivalry between colleges and the College Cup.

The colleges also don't get the same level of engagement from non-white students, so as the demographic changes, work needs to be done in the engagement of these groups. There's a lot of pride, but from a marginal group of people. We need to manage our expectations when comparing engagement to 5 years ago.

Action: Look at the demographic changes and how this would be reflected in the byelaws and democratic structure

10) Summer Ball Discussion Paper

Paper taken as read.

CEO verbal update. There's a long history of the Summer Ball stretching back to the 60s and last year we lost money and we saw a mixed results.

The experience of students who attended were good and production costs were high but we have had a very difficult year commercially. This has put the Summer Ball into focus and the look and feel of the event is going to be in the future. This paper doesn't suggest what the event will look like next year but there are questions to consider: (i) how can the summer ball be viable financially as a high production high engagement event?, (ii) are there other approaches that can be taken for the event to ensure return but to also provide students with that engagement opportunity. The conclusion is drawn from a reflection on last year's event to help guide decision moving forward, to refine the acts' budget, have multiple approaches to selling tickets, including structures to allow the event to be more affordable to students, adjust the size of events so we don't lose out on space and security, and to take a stronger with the university's contracted caterers to bring a profit share or contribution. We still want to ensure that we offer an event that won't look like a good last year and might be very different but is still an end of year celebration.

Advantages of running this again is the opportunity to make money if spending is curtailed and if the amount of money spent is at the right amount (went over this last year), opportunity for students to engage with high quality experience and to do something quite unique that many other university's might not be able to execute, and there is also the tradition of the event which keeps student engaged with the campus.

We can scale it back to being more affordable, make cheaper tickets or allowing for deposits for tickets so the costs can be spread.

MI: One of the big concerns is that the event only engaged only one demographic, especially when looking at the environment and the acts etc. Josh looking at diversifying acts and food to try and engage all students to reach our changing demographic. Until it starts becoming more universal to our entire student's body, it won't be profitable, when only a small demographic is engaged. That kind of trust from students to spend this much money.

This isn't something that is important to the university experience for many students.

We need to improve our marketing of the event, not just social media, in person and flyers and word of mouth. Bring back a launch night. Market it as a celebration. Consensus is to keep the ball but to think about who it's for, what's the purpose and the prices.

Action: Cost control and value proposition needs to be discussed over the next month so that planning can be put in place for the Summer Ball.

Budget proposal to be made

11) Draft Study Leave Policy

Taken as Read. MG presented the paper, noting that we need a study leave policy but currently do not have one in place.

To help students who have longer degrees or who have to delay submission due to whatever reason, this policy will give officers guidance and how this will support them while they take on additional study. Policy is to be implemented immediately and review annually unless something better comes out of the HR policy review. Five days to be granted as paid leave and ten days additional leave can be requested, but this will be unpaid leave. If more is needed this will be discussed with line manager or CEO.

There is a process for appeals and guidelines on different types of qualifications.

Editing note: 8.1 refers to hybrid working but needs to be edited to include study leave. Eleanor will send edits across. If needed, e.g. 3.1 to be looked at as well.

Approved by board.

12) Any Other Business

MG noted that he hasn't set his paternity leave yet. Could fall from end of Feb to start of April. Nothing prescriptive in the student handbook. Will keep everyone updated on the plan. Will take 2 weeks with additional leave either side. Will be confirmed in the new year. Nish and Josh will step in. Jonathan will approve payments closer to the time, Mark will put together a handover plan.

There was no other business and the meeting closed at 7:45pm.