# SUBT 20/21 Minutes October 2020

**UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK STUDENTS UNION BOARD OF TRUSTEES 2020/21**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 13 October 2020 via Zoom**

**Chair:** Jen Mackness (External Trustee)

**Present:** Daniel Betts (DB) (Student Trustee); Mauro Cardoso (MC) (Vice President, SU); Lou Chiu (LC) (External Trustee); Andrew Crowe (AC) (External Trustee); Dan Goulbourn (DG) (President, SU); Peter Knights (PK) (Finance Manager, SU) (until item 10); Sarah Tattersall (ST) (CEO, SU); Alex Gooch (AG) (Student Trustee); Caroline Waters (CW) (External Trustee)

**Secretary:** Sarah Tattersall (ST) (Chief Executive, SU)

**Clerk:** Selena Timmins Chapman (Assistant Manager (Committee and Validation), University of Suffolk) (STC)

**Apologies:** Stuart Tinsely (STin) (Director of Finance and Planning, University of Suffolk)

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| **Agenda Item** | **Notes** | **Action** |
| 1. Welcome | The Chair welcomed members and those in attendance. |  |
| 1. Apologies | STin sent apologies. |  |
| 1. Conflict of interest | It was noted that STin had sent apologies due to a conflict of interest around item 8. |  |
| 1. Remarks from the Chair | The Chair took the opportunity to brief new members on the various backgrounds and areas of interest of all members.  It was noted that the main area of discussion was expected to be around item 8. |  |
| 1. Minutes of previous meetings | Members approved minutes of the meeting held 25 February 2020. |  |
| 1. Action record and matters arising | The majority of actions had been resolved. An update on the two outstanding actions was provided under matters arising.  Matters arising:   * Regarding succession planning, members were asked to pass on nominees for the role of SUBT Chair; * Investigations into support needed for off-campus students as well as around planned increases in student numbers had been delayed due to Covid but would now resume. | All  ST |
| 1. CEO report and Executive reports | The following CEO report updates were provided:   * Most SU staff were again working in the office, where social distancing and bubbles were in place; a longer break from the office over the Christmas period was expected to act as an informal circuit breaker; the SU had submitted a plan to the University around staff on site; arrangements around office working were under continuous review; * New coach contracts had been appointed; * Confirmation of the full block grant from the University to the SU for the current academic year was outstanding; ST would meet with the VC about the shortfall around the discretionary grant and submit the required paper to Exex; * Following guidance from sport organisations regarding safety, face-to-face sport was again in place; societies remained online due in part to lack of space on campus to allow social distancing and in part to relatively low student interest; 350 students were involved in societies which was an increase from the previous year; * Student take-up for course rep nominations was half what it had been the previous year, due to the inability to do in person ‘shout outs’ however the SU was monitoring this and doing what was possible to increase visibility including online; * Freshers’ activities were primarily online and the SU would only realise limited income from the sale of Freshers’ boxes. Without ‘big ticket’ items such as bar coda there would be no ticket sales income. There was a drop in participation / zoom fatigue as time progressed; engagement was in line with the sector however; * Advice services for student were entirely online due to Covid; cases were about 20 higher than the previous year; most cases were academic appeals or placement-related; the SU was managing with the caseload but additional cases would make the current model unsustainable; the new booking system made booking appointments easier for students; * NSS results were included in the July 2020 CEO report; the SU was noted as ‘above average’ in the sector.   Members queried what the student experience was at the moment. The SU explained that whilst there were many fewer students spending time on campus for learning and teaching due to Covid advice, they had received positive feedback and that students seemed to be coping well in general. Some students were receptive to doing whatever could be done face-to-face whereas others where more anxious. The social space and shop were in use by students. SUBT members who were also students reported that the campus was much quieter and that while there was some opportunity for face-to-face learning and teaching they were not sure how many students were taking up these opportunities.  Regarding the block grant, members felt that the model was not sustainable and further felt that the SUBT should review and agree any SU commitment to targets set by the University. There was an action to bring this matter back to SUBT for discussion.  Student numbers and retention were next discussed. ST reported that the SU did not yet have access to data but were hoping to get more information from the VC shortly.  Members encouraged ST to ask specifically about EAST School numbers and the number of students based at Partner institutions, especially those expected to recruit large numbers, e.g. LSC. The SU would need to use this information to ensure they received sufficient funds from the University to support these students. ST was encouraged too to ask about the University’s plans for retention and to emphasis that the SU would need funding to help support student retention. ST agreed and reported that she felt, based on discussion with the DVC, that the University did not plan to reduce support for a good student experience.  Communication with the University around funding was also picked up in item 9: Finance; Management accounts.  The following presidential campaign updates were provided:   * DG was liaising with the University’s Director of Learning and Teaching around standardised feedback; * Covid was proving a challenge around the ‘Good Night Out’ campaign; * The organisers of the nation-wide ‘Good Night Out’ offered training, however although this appeared useful there was a significant cost attached.   Members discussed how the ‘Good Night Out’ campaign could be progressed to provide a safe environment for students in Ipswich. LC had a contact at UEA who was involved in their ‘Good Night Out’ initiative as well as their safe taxi scheme and would put DG in touch. Members also discussed the value in expanding the ‘Good Night Out’ campaign as a community project and it was recommended that DG liaise with Ipswich Borough Council about bidding for funding.  The following vice-presidential campaign updates were provided:   * Work was underway toward creating additional capacity within the SU to support mental health for the purpose of helping students waiting for a University appointment (at the moment there was a two-week waiting list); * MC met regularly with the Head of Student Services at the University to work collaboratively to support student wellbeing and to concentrate on a few key projects; * Work was underway toward the implementation of an ‘Active Bystander’ pilot; * There was an exploration of whether any free extracurricular modules could be delivered to students alongside their degree, e.g. to develop extra skills and/or meet accreditation requirements; * MC was liaising with the University’s Business Development Manager (CPD) about the potential for language courses for students; * Building student community was proving difficult with Covid however some online events including for Black History month were planned and/or in place.   Members were impressed with the manifestos of both MC and DG. It was reported that the Office for Students had re-opened their mental health competition and members therefore encouraged MC to investigate a bid in conjunction with Student Services. MC was also encouraged to think further about the role of clubs and societies in building a University community. LG was working with some other HEIs around allyship and would meet separately with MC to see how her experience could further help his work. | ST  ST  LC/DG  MC |
| 1. Shop SU | Details about the current position of the shop were provided in the paper and summarised by ST. The SU had take action where possible to support the shop, however the shop remained unsustainable. SU Commercial activity across the sector were struggling but the SU shop was in a worse position than most for having not been open for very long (6 months) before Covid. As well, the shop was not eligible for any further government support. ST presented three possible options to members for discussion.   1. The SU could make a loan to the shop, however ST cautioned that the SU was not in a good position to do this, due in part to the situation with the block grant and Charity Commission requirements. 2. The University could be asked to support the shop for a limited time; this had been discussed informally between the two parties. 3. Closure of the shop and payment of any liabilities.   Members discussed that even considered separately from the social space, the shop was an integral part of student experience and also essentially a part of the University’s offer to applicants. Members also agreed that the SU should not be expected to put any further financial investment into keeping the shop open and that the University had a responsibility to support the shop as part of the student experience. It was therefore agreed that option 2 be pursued.  Members who were also current or former students shared personal stories of the impact the shop and social space had had on their experience and it was suggested these stories could be presented to the University as part of the SU’s request, if necessary.  Members then discussed the logistics and issues surrounding the decision to request support from the University including timescales; the balance between this request and the request for the rest of the block grant occurring at roughly the same time; and the impact of the request on the SU’s working relationship with the University. Members also noted that the East building development would mean additional numbers on campus and would help secure the longer term future of the shop.  Members agreed that ST and PK would compile a realistic plan about financial support needed for the shop through September 2021. It was also agreed that the SU would be upfront with the University now about the full cost of the shop’s significant contractual obligations. The SU would also be prepared to explain their continued plans to ensure the shop was as self-sufficient as possible.  Should the University not be prepared to support the plan, the SU would notify the University of the likely shop closure.  ST would draft the communication to the University and circulate this to members.  The Chair thanked members for a useful discussion. | ST and PK  ST |
| 1. Finance; Management accounts | A review of the first month of the fiscal year was included in the papers. PK noted that the numbers were distorted however due to receiving 25K rather than the 90k that had been received in the previous year (and formed the discretionary element of the Block Grant)  PK had looked at the second month earlier the same day that the SUBT met and reported an 11.5K deficit. However this was less alarming than it first appeared when taking into account necessary payments to NUS the previous month as well as budgeting for Freshers’ income that did not materialise. ST would add further available information about the Freshers’ review to Teams for members to view. The yearly deficit to date was 23K.  Returning to the issue of the block grant previously discussed as part of the CEO report (item 7), members were reminded that only the core part of the block grant had been agreed. It was reported that STin had advised that the SU would need to apply for the discretionary part of the block grant. ST felt that whilst the SU was unlikely to be denied the application, it would take a significant amount of time to prepare.  Members queried whether there was a memorandum of understanding in place with the University around the block grant. ST reported that whilst previous attempts had been made, there was not a memorandum in place. ST felt it would reduce delays in supporting students if the grant amount was agreed two years before it was needed, for planning purposes. It was reported University was reluctant to commit to this due to annual uncertainty around recruitment. Nevertheless, members urged ST to seek a memorandum with the University that at least covered communication about delivery of the block grant. ST would investigate this matter further. | ST  ST |
| 1. Financial regulations | ST updated on this item on behalf of PK. The financial regulations had been reviewed as part of the regular review cycle to ensure they remained fit for purpose. It was reported that STin had contributed to the review and was satisfied with the amended regulations. Highlights of the review included:   * The removal of cash transactions including petty cash; * An update of the financial schedules to include roles and financial limits; * The introduction of appendix 3 around operational procedures for trading.   Members queried whether the removal of cash transactions would affect student fundraising. ST reported that it wasn’t likely to have a significant impact as payment devices provided by the SU could be used as well as the SU shop tills if necessary. Clubs and societies were paid for via memberships rather than cash. Social sports and sports club membership were free at the moment in case they needed to be cut short due to Covid but would revert to online subscriptions. Other students’ unions had not reported any significant issues after making similar moves.  Members approved the revised financial regulations. |  |
| 1. Any other business | There would soon be an SUBT Board Development Afternoon and in preparation ST had sent out a skills questionnaire to new and existing members. ST would seek an outside guest speaker for the event and requested that members submit any ideas for development sessions. | All |
| 1. Dates of next meetings | * Update on TEAMS of Block Grant and Shop Action by Friday 20 Nov 2020 (ST to circulate link) * Board Development Afternoon: Fri, 22 January 2021 at 2pm via Zoom * SUBT: Tue, 23 Feb 2021 at 4pm, venue to be confirmed |  |