

CAMBRIDGE SU TRUSTEE BOARD MINUTES - 01.05.2024

<p>Attendance Voting Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chara Triantafyllidou - CT Student Trustee (PG) • Caredig ap Tomos - CaT Access, Education and Participation Officer (AEP) • Fergus Kirman - FK Undergraduate President (Chair) • Gemma Donaldson - GD External Trustee • Luke Patterson - LP Student Trustee (UG) • Myesha Jemison - MJ Student Trustee (PG) • Neil Buchanan NB External Trustee • Simon To - ST External Trustee (Deputy Chair) • Vareesh Pratap - VP Postgraduate President <p>Observers & Guests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christina Kennedy - CK Chief Executive Officer • Gabbi Foreman - GF Director of Membership Engagement, Deputy CEO • Oli Gray - OG Director of Enterprise and Services, Minute taker 	<p>Apologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lewys Thomas - LT External Trustee <p>Absent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maroof Rafique - MR BME Officer
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Item	Discussion	Actions
1. Apologies	Apologies received from LT.	
2. Conflicts of Interest	None declared.	
3. Minutes of the previous meeting	Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.	
4. Matters arising	FK updated that accounts were filed with the Charity Commission yesterday. FK noted that, in order to meet the deadline, he signed the auditor's Letter of Representation	

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	(enclosed in the folder) on behalf of the Trustee Board.	
5. Business since the previous meeting	<p>FK summarised the new appointments made to the board, and ratified at Student Council on 29th April.</p> <p>The Board noted that the new postgraduate student trustee will not be a postgraduate student until their matriculation in Michaelmas, and discussed how the Board should facilitate their role in the meantime. The board agreed that this member could be invited as an observer to the board's meetings until they formally become a postgraduate student in September/October, when they should then begin in their role as a Student Trustee.</p> <p>CT offered, as an outgoing postgraduate student trustee who had only begun their first term in October 2022, to serve on the Board on a transitional basis to coincide with the start of the next academic year, when the new appointee could formally begin their term.</p> <p>The Board agreed that this would be the best approach, and expressed its gratitude to CT.</p>	
6. Campaigns update from sabbatical officers	CaT provided an update on sabbatical officers' campaign work.	
7. Advice & Welfare Team Update	<p>FK took the Advice & Welfare Team update as read, and welcomed questions from members of the board.</p> <p>VP welcomed the update, and suggested making greater use of exit surveys as an additional method of collecting feedback from service users, which could then be represented in the annual report for students, as well as in updates to the Board. LP added that this had been discussed in a previous meeting. GF confirmed that this is being worked on, though considerations about the GDPR implications of this data collection have previously meant that exit surveys have had a relatively low completion rate. GF added that the Advice & Welfare Team is seeking best practice from across the sector in gathering feedback from service users.</p> <p>LP asked for clarification on the definition of a 'past student'. GF explained that the team provides support for students who have graduated, as well as those who are intermitting. LP noted that the Advice Service's work as a whole links well to the work included in the College Engagement Plan, and the Board noted the importance of including the Union's advice offering centrally in the plan.</p> <p>The Board noted that the data shows a high proportion of postgraduate and mature students using the service, and GF suggested that a higher proportion of undergraduate</p>	

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	<p>students live in college, and therefore are more likely to seek out internal college support systems first.</p> <p>CT added that some colleges have dedicated wellbeing centres which students will often approach first, and this may lead to a reduction in students that the SU sees from specific colleges.</p> <p>The Board expressed its gratitude to the Welfare and Advice Manager and her team for their work on preparing the update and the 2022-23 annual report.</p>	
8. Democracy & Representation Team Update	<p>FK took the Democracy & Representation Team update as read, and welcomed questions from members of the board.</p> <p>VP asked for clarification about the phrasing in how a decision by Democracy Committee was reported in section 5 of the report, and FK explained that the report refers to decisions that were made in the past. FK suggested that VP discusses this further with GF to seek further clarification if necessary.</p> <p>CT asked how involved the Democracy Committee are in the planning for elections, for example for decisions such as creating an election mascot. GF explained that the Democracy & Representation Team and the Communications & Marketing Team are responsible for the operational delivery of the elections, including planning initiatives related to increasing turnout. CT suggested giving students 'more notice' of the election happening so that students do not feel surprised by this, and queried whether there was scope to allow more time for campaigning and voting. FK explained that some requirements for duration of campaigning and voting are specified in the By-Laws, but that otherwise the SU weighs the length of the elections with other aspects such as candidate welfare. ST explained that more widely in the SU sector, voter turnout tends not to be altered by voting periods being shortened or lengthened.</p> <p>Members of the Board expressed their disappointment about the marginally decreased turnout, and noted the importance of planning communications far in advance. FK echoed CT's concerns specifically around the communications of the elections, particularly about maximising the use of social media.</p> <p>FK observed that the withdrawal rate was particularly high this year, and suggested the team explores how candidates could be further supported and informed ahead of nominating themselves. CT suggested that the level of study among postgraduate candidates should be considered when evaluating withdrawals, as this may be a factor. ST suggested using panels or other fora to gather previous candidates' insight, and utilising this to inform</p>	VP to follow up with GF to discuss how Democracy Committee decisions are reported in the Democracy and Representation Team Update.

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	<p>students about the requirements and support available prior to nominations closing. The Board agreed that providing more 'mythbusting' on issues such as access to visas would be a good avenue of support for potential candidates.</p> <p>ST suggested a communications pack is compiled for departments and colleges. CT summarised her experiences of receiving communications about the elections through her college common room, and emphasised the importance of integrating election-related communications into the College Engagement Plan, for example with emails being circulated directly via J/MCRs. FK agreed that the SU should seek to improve this approach in the future, and avoid relying on sabbatical officers undertaking <i>ad hoc</i> and patchwork communication with college common rooms during the elections.</p> <p>LP expressed disappointment about the approach to promoting the ongoing Easter by-election (for Welfare & Community Officer), and noted that the opportunity to run in the election had only been mentioned at the bottom of the most recent SU bulletin, a few days into the nomination period. LP also queried whether the high withdrawal rate of candidates might be a result of confusion among potential candidates as to whether or not the roles being advertised were full-time paid roles, and suggested that the SU could continue to enhance its efforts to publicise this.</p> <p>LP noted that posting flyers to college common rooms could be effective, but that it was essential to give committee members prior notice that these would be circulated. Members of the Board noted that initiatives trialled this year, such as the introduction of an elections mascot, had received mixed feedback, and emphasised the importance of inviting insight from current Cambridge students and sabbatical officers in designing such initiatives in future years.</p> <p>VP agreed that improvements are required to increase engagement in the elections process, and would especially welcome this for postgraduate students. VP queried a rule change made before the elections to prohibit individuals from running for multiple roles at the same time, and FK noted that this change was made by the Democracy Committee, and explained that by-elections would be necessitated if one individual were allowed to run in (and win) multiple races simultaneously.</p> <p>CaT noted that the part time roles have traditionally seen lower candidate turnout, and that these should be reviewed. GF explained that whilst the ongoing Democracy & Governance Review will take sabbatical officer portfolios as its primary focus, there should also be recommendations</p>	<p>GF to bring a report to Board outlining the action plan to improve voter turnout for the 2025 elections.</p>

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	<p>about how to improve and strengthen part-time representation.</p> <p>MJ noted the importance of improved communications around elections, but highlighted the broader issues of student apathy about voting in such elections generally. MJ noted the correlation of higher voter turnout with instances when the SU is running a referendum alongside sabbatical officer elections, or where there is a broader range of candidates and views on offer. MJ also emphasised the importance of tracking student engagement outside of voter turnout, and commented that there appeared to be underlying issues around student interest and engagement.</p> <p>ST agreed that focussing on the nomination stage was very useful, as the trend of a higher number of candidates leading to higher voter turnout is exhibited more broadly across the sector.</p> <p>LP warned that the SU is at risk of not meeting its charitable objectives if the organisation allows managed decline in voter turnout. LP commented that further analysis of the data provided to the Board would be welcome. LP added that minutes from Democracy Committee meetings have not been uploaded for a significant period of time.</p> <p>LP also noted that the Executive Committee had been hindered significantly by very low attendance at its meetings, and FK confirmed that redesigning and revitalising this would be a priority for the ongoing Democracy & Governance Review.</p> <p>The Board asked to receive a report outlining the action plan to improve voter turnout for the 2025 elections at its next meeting.</p>	
9. CEO Update	<p>CK provided a summary of the CEO Report.</p> <p>MJ welcomed the report, specifically a comprehensive lessons-learned review of the audit process. MJ suggested the next CEO Report includes an update on progress to improve staff culture within the organisation.</p> <p>MJ asked if the university has provided any feedback on rejecting the request for additional funding specifically for improved safety and accessibility measures at Freshers Fair. FK confirmed that the University had rejected this request in spite of support from CCSSU, and that it appeared to be based solely on the University's very challenging current financial position.</p> <p>FK suggested the auditors should attend the next board meeting. CK will look into arranging this.</p>	<p>CK to provide an update on staff culture in next CEO report.</p> <p>CK to invite auditors to the next board meeting.</p> <p>GF/OG to update the website with the new safeguarding policy.</p>

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	<p>LP asked for an update on the status of the Safeguarding Policy, which the Board noted it had approved in Michaelmas.</p> <p>LP reflected on the previous board meeting, at which a trading subsidiary has been approved by board, and asked for a progress update. CK confirmed that the SU was seeking input from NUS about how to approach setting up the subsidiary, rather than whether to do so.</p> <p>FK confirmed that the Board would like this to be a priority now that the audit is finished, and would await further updates.</p>	
10. Financial Sustainability Strategy	<p>FK provided a summary of the Reserves Framework for the Financial Sustainability Strategy.</p> <p>GD asked how the reserves target figure was calculated. FK summarised how the reserves policy creates a target of a fixed percentage of the SU's commercial income, as well as two months of staff salary spend, which in 2023-24 amounts to £299,975. GD noted that commercial revenue and staff spend is likely to vary between now and 2029/30, and FK agreed, noting that a plausible increase in commercial revenue might see an increase in the region of 10% in the free reserves target by 2029/30. The Board agreed that there should be scope for continuous review of the target over time by the Board, especially as the organisation approaches the financial year 2030/31.</p> <p>The Board approved the Reserves Framework for the Financial Sustainability Strategy, as an envelope for budgeting over the next five years.</p> <p>CK summarised the outline plan for creating a full strategy, including recent discussions with the Finance sub-committee, and an upcoming meeting with commercial partners such as Rock Box (the provider of the SU digital signage distributed across teaching spaces and colleges)</p> <p>FK noted that one pertinent element for the Board was the proposal to invest some money in a consultant if necessary. CK confirmed this would be a matter of seeking some input in shaping the fundamentals of the strategy, which would be presented to the Board in June, rather than obtaining continuous support. The Board approved this direction of travel, and noted the scope for individual trustees to send in more specific and detailed feedback to SMT.</p>	
11. Free Speech preparation	FK provided an update on progress of compliance with new Freedom of Speech legislation. Item A proposes a change to the by-laws, and Item B shows the University's new Code of Practice, which the SU could model its approach on.	FK to ensure that the approved Amendments are shared with CCSSU for note

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	<p>After discussion, the Board approved in principle creating a Code of Practice mirroring as closely as possible with the University's, and noted that it would expect to receive the detailed draft of this in due course.</p> <p>MJ asked for further clarification about how emergency motions currently functioned, and what the new process for submitting such motions would look like. FK explained that the opportunity to submit emergency motions would not be altered, but the ability to screen such motions for unlawful speech would be properly codified.</p> <p>LP queried whether Amendment D (Conduct in meetings) should draw on By-Law 18's definition of misconduct in the proposed way. FK explained how this use of internal referencing would work in practice, including the reduced opportunity for subjective judgement about what constituted 'disrespectful' conduct, and a clearer articulation of how to approach disruption at Student Council. The Board discussed whether the Amendment should be broadened so that disrespectful conduct towards anyone in the world, rather than only those defined in By-Law 18, was included in scope. ST suggested that it would be better to retain the focus on the context of the SU and University of Cambridge, and the Board noted the importance of adhering to its legal duty to allow offensive, but lawful, speech.</p> <p>VP queried whether Amendment B (Process and reasons for refusing acceptance to a motion) should be changed to give Democracy Committee an additional role in advising whether a motion should be accepted, before the Board was involved. The Board noted the importance of balancing having suitable tiers of escalation with the ability to take timely action for students wishing to submit motions, and felt on balance that it was more important to reduce the number of 'gates' a motion had to pass through if the lawfulness of its content were under question. The Board also acknowledged the importance of accepting liability itself, and reducing the exposure of individual student volunteers to risk.</p> <p>GD asked further questions about how emergency motions function currently, and FK explained that under both the current and proposed processes, it is possible to submit emergency motions on matters arising after the ordinary deadline for motions. The Board noted the difficulty that would be entailed in moving the deadline for emergency motions substantially earlier, and reaffirmed the value of allowing students to submit such motions until the meeting itself, given the nature of 'emergency' situations.</p> <p>CaT queried whether Amendment B goes far enough in protecting the Chair of Student Council from public</p>	<p>A resolution to approve the proposal to amend the By-Laws (as under Article 47.3.3) to be circulated to Student Council, for its meeting on 13th May in the first instance</p>

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	<p>pressure or legal risk regarding decisions they may need to make. FK explained that the amendment outlines clear requirements for what the Chair should do when taking decisions, and this is a marked improvement in support of the Chair compared to the current situation, as the Chair would be able to defer to the written process, and emphasise that they did not have the discretion they currently have.</p> <p>ST asked if the framing in Amendment A can be changed to make this positive, e.g. change to 'the chair can accept' rather than 'the chair must refuse'. The Board agreed that this would be a useful alteration, and agreed to make editorial/ phrasing changes to this effect.</p> <p>ST suggested looking at how the emergency motion structure could accommodate future events, acknowledging the gaps that can occur between meetings (in particular over vacations), although conceded that this would be very complex to articulate within by-laws. FK explained this constituted a wider issue with the by-laws, and GF agreed that this does not necessarily lie within the core aim of Free Speech compliance. FK reminded trustees of the rationale for the narrow focus on complying with relevant regulation in making these amendments, as the potential future financial and legal risk to the SU of non-compliance was very significant.</p> <p>FK queried whether the Board would like to attempt to make these changes this term, to come into effect from 1st August 2024, and noted the potential opportunities and difficulties entailed in bringing this proposal to the second Student Council of Easter 2024, including the overarching chance that the Council meeting would be inquorate, delaying implementation until October 2024. CaT and LP expressed willingness to attempt to make this change now, not least in the interests of complying as promptly as possible with the OfS as a regulator. The Board agreed that the most responsible approach would be to attempt to make the change now, acknowledging that it may nonetheless fall to the next Sabbatical Officer team to bring the changes again in October 2024, to the next meeting of Student Council.</p> <p>FK outlined the next steps for how these will be presented to Student Council, with scope to first share them with CCSSU for note at its meeting on 7th May.</p> <p>The board approved the proposal to amend the by-laws as detailed in Amendments A - E (incorporating editorial changes to the effect suggested by ST for Amendment A) and agreed for the proposal to be presented for vote at the next Student Council meeting in Easter Term (on 13th May). If the proposal is approved at that meeting, the</p>	

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	changes could come into effect on 1st August 2024, coinciding with the commencement of new free speech duties.	
12. Enhanced security for the SU Office	<p>VP provided a summary of the paper. FK noted that the operational changes would be welcomed by the Board, provided that there was not substantial additional cost attached, in which case it would likely be necessary to evaluate the costs and benefits of the change.</p> <p>The Board agreed that VP should liaise with SMT to explore how these recommendations could be implemented, mindful of significant resource constraints.</p>	VP to liaise with SMT to explore how these recommendations could be implemented at minimal cost
13. Future meetings timings	<i>Deferred to circulation</i>	
14. Date of next meeting	Wednesday 26th June 2023	
15. Any other business	The board agreed to delegate to CaT to answer any questions arising to the Board from the previous meeting of Student Council regarding the Motion discussed at the Board's previous meeting.	