

Student Council Meeting

Meeting held in Students' Union, Frenchay Campus, at 17:30 on Tuesday 06th February

001: The Chair introduced himself and welcomed those present to the second SCM of the year and set out the agenda and purposes of the meeting and role of the Democratic Procedures Committee. The Secretary updated that since the last meeting, all Ideas discussed by the SCM had been approved by the Board of Trustees, bar one in addition to one Idea which had by-passed SCM, and that the Ideas section of the website had been updated with the reasons for these rejections.

002: The Executive had provided reports of activities to date that had been circulated to members previously. Members were able to send in questions requiring quantitative answers beforehand.

Ayrden to VP Ed: The £75 bursary for Arts resources has not increased in four years; what are your comments on that?

VP Ed: I have been supporting the LDR for Art and Design to gather student feedback to take to the Department and Faculty in addition to using data gathered from the SU's strategy and engaging directly with City Campus students to explore and then demonstrate the differing needs of students. I will take this further in a wider report about hidden costs faced by all students and the University Directorate are looking at this as part of their commitment to value for money.

Ayrden supplemental: Can the bursary be linked to inflation at the least?

VP Ed: This is something that is being looked into as well as what is made available for PG students who at present get nothing.

Ayrden supplemental: What scope is there for students studying niche disciplines to receive higher allowances?

VP Ed: Everything is open for debate and discussion and I can take this forward if there is student demand.

Ayrden to VP Ed: Can the library delivery service be modified for City Campus to take into account that this is a multi-site campus?

VP Ed: I will definitely raise this.

Ayrden to VP Ed: Are there plans to use the Farmhouse once it is vacated to store part of the Library's physical collection to protect certain parts of this collection?

VP Ed: The University is open to this and to engaging with students so as long as there is evidence of student need and demand, then this is something we can work on.

Ayrden supplemental: Can you provide information on the consultation on the future of the farmhouse? Will you publish your findings?

VP C+W: The University asked for quick polls so we used Twitter and Facebook which were used to only guide the initial consultation. The data is now gone because of an IT issue.

Ayrden to VP Ed: What lobbying can be undertaken to promote awareness of underused study space?

VP Ed: I have emailed to get information about student footfall in these areas and have been contacted by the University about a study space working group but this has not yet come to pass. I am also looking at getting study spaces listed on campus maps.

Freddie to VP C+W: In your report, you discuss achieving NUS Alcohol Impact Accreditation, do we have to maintain all of these criteria standards?

VP C+W: We are audited every three years.

Freddie supplemental: Given the nature of many of the criteria, was there a student demand for this? The wellbeing survey that the SU conducted demonstrated a small link between alcohol and mental ill-health and we still do not have a great reputation in the community in this regard and so this is for the greater good of students and the Union's reputation. Additionally, student often complain that there are not enough non-drinking activities within the SU.

Freddie supplemental: Specifically, has anyone said they are worried about drinking games or pub-crawls?

VP C+W: There was a student policy relating to this voted on at AGM before I became a member of the Executive.

Freddie to VP C+W: Curtailing drinking games and pub-crawls are mentioned specifically as optional criteria in the Accreditation, will we be pushing this?

VP C+W: I honestly cannot remember.

Freddie to VP S+H: Most students are quite comfortable with drinking games and that doesn't mean they have a problem; your own survey shows there are more important/pressing issues so most students would object to you curtailing their safe enjoyment of alcohol.

Derya: Such as by sanitising initiations and welcome socials which means they will then be carried out beyond the auspices of the SU in private homes taking away the level of safety.

VP S+H: Striking the right balance is difficult but we also have a responsibility to think about those students who, for whatever reason, do not wish to be part of the drinking culture.

Derya supplemental: My point is that you are losing oversight; is going through all these extra steps actually pushing student groups further away from the SU and a safe drinking environment? I have observed several initiations and they were all good natured and the drinking was responsible.

James supplemental: Are there incentives that could be used to encourage clubs and other student groups to use the SU for initiations?

VP S+H: This is definitely something we can look at.

James to VP C+W: According to the wellbeing survey, students living at home feel outside of the campus community; what is being done to address this?

VP C+W: The report does make some recommendations but is mainly there to present data and evidence to the University to begin conversations. We do already have an active Students Living at Home Society.

James to VP C+A: What is being done about the demand for more non-alcohol focused events, especially expanding this for PGs?

VP C+W: There are actually lots of these events going on, the main issue is visibility but as communications are beginning to get through. This was also raised in our Welcome Week meeting with a specific reference to PG students.

VP S+H: We are actively seeking feedback from students about what they want to see in Welcome Week.

James to VP C+W: According to your report, your previous report and recommendations on accommodation issues have not been acted upon, what are you doing about this?

VP C+W: I have brought this up time and again with the University Directorate and I am raising it again at the next Rent Setting Board which has a new member with a student experience remit.

VP Ed: Additionally we are taking my report on extra costs and UCAS has pointed out that UWE is now the most expensive for rented accommodation which gives renewed impetus to our arguments.

James to VP C+W: The flooding at Phoenix Court, is there any update on student feedback to this incident?

VP C+W: It honestly slipped my mind but I have now raised the issues from the previous SCM with Unite who said they are working on this.

Derya to VP C+W: If this is the final copy of the wellbeing report, why wasn't it proofread?

VP C+W: I don't know.

Derya supplemental: Where were the sections for your method and the collection of data and was there any scope for breaking down categories using the UWE identity metrics e.g. campus of study?

VP C+W: These can all be included in future reports as it is intended to be an on-going piece of work.

Derya supplemental: Only a small number of students reported problems about drug and alcohol use related to mental health so why was there so much attention put on this in the report?

VP C+W: Students are very self-aware of the links between drugs and alcohol and so this represents just the tip of the ice-berg. Also, this is a subject very much in the University's radar.

Derya to VP C+W: Does this mean the University is pushing a particular viewpoint?

VP C+W: It is still important, for example the link between recent student deaths and drug use.

Ayrden supplemental: If the focus on drug and alcohol use is because of the University's agenda, could other stresses be missed?

VP C+W: All issues are being included in the report to LTSEC.

Ayrden supplemental: To tackle the (mis)use of drugs and alcohol, which are a symptom, shouldn't the focus first be on underlying causes?

VP C+W: I am not only talking about this but also a range of issues. It is a significant issue and I am not ignoring it.

Derya supplemental: Will the SU lobby the University to change its stance from zero tolerance to harm reduction?

VP C+W: The University has given money to get in the Bristol Drug Project and their whole mantra is harm reduction.

Derya supplemental: Only 0.8% of respondents had used DHI (Drug Health and Independence). Will an effort be made to advertise this service?

VP C+W: Students aren't aware of this service because it is brand new but we are looking at what can be done about that.

Derya supplemental: The total number of respondents was well above the 376 threshold but this was not reached for some sections, is the data still representative?

VP C+W: I think so.

VP S+H: The total number of people using these services has increased massively.

James to VP C+W: Is the use of Kooth Students a trial because it is being pushed very hard and noticeable problems particularly with speed.

VP C+W: Please bring these issues to my attention directly so I can escalate them quickly.

Derya to VP C+W: Is there a broader vision for the survey other than the recommendations?

VP C+W: There is only one recommendation going to LTSEC; to create a mental health working group, which includes student representation, to inform the mental health strategy. It is not just the other 18 recommendations in the report.

Derya supplemental: how often does the University reassess its mental health strategy and if there was no working group how would we affect this?

VP C+W: We have regular meeting with lots of other working groups and key stakeholders; this is about streamlining the process to focus the issues.

Derya to all: Surveys put out by the SU are very convoluted, long, drawn out and not succinct, even for the level of information required, what can be done to make these better?

VP C+W: This particular survey had multiple streams so that is why it was so long but it still got excellent responses.

Derya supplemental: But can surveys be made more user friendly?

VP S+H: It might be difficult given the broad nature of services and opportunities offered.

Ayrden to VP S+H: Regarding Varsity Rugby, is there scope for a match to still take place without spectators?

VP S+H: This is precisely what's happening; there will be rugby played just not in the format it has been the last two years.

Freddie supplemental: How was this decision reached?

VP S+H: The Varsity Board reached this decision alongside the RFU who also provided advice.

Thomas supplemental: Will there be any access for students e.g. through student media?

VP S+H: I will have to check that and get back to you.

Derya supplemental: You said before that no formal report was written and in last year's Student Behaviour and Health Report, it clearly says only three students were given a disciplinary.

VP S+H: As far as I know, over 20 students were given a disciplinary.

Derya: This was announced after the last SCM.

VP S+H: This was announced soon after it happened.

Derya supplemental: There is a Student Idea to restore Varsity Rugby open for vote now so if this passes you could have a democratic mandate to restore it.

VP S+H: There are many related issues that both the UWE and Bristol Varsity Boards would have concerns relating to reputation and student safety.

Derya: But if there was no report..?

VP S+H: Perhaps these aren't all written down in one place but they have all been discussed thoroughly so putting it back on straightway is unlikely.

Derya to VP S+H: What has been done to widen participation in sport?

VP S+H: There is a HallsLife sports day coming up, we are also looking to link HallsLife and Varsity with the mass participation events as well as pushing the social sport programme.

Derya to VP S+H: What are the dangers associated with yearlong Varsity?

VP S+H: We took student feedback from the Sports Conference to the Varsity Board which favoured a shorter space of time; of all the feedback from other students and from Bristol is the same then perhaps we can look at changing the shape of Varsity.

Freddie to VP S+C: Can you guarantee a press pass for student media to Varsity?

VP S+C: I can't guarantee this but I will work with VP S+H to get this.

Freddie to VP S+C: You have got good engagement so far on the Societies Facebook page but only form societies and not the wider student body.

VP S+C: Now that it's established, I am hoping that the engagement will be better next year post-Freshers.

James supplemental: How can you mandate that to continue next year if you are not in office.

VP S+C: I will make it part of my handover; although I can't mandate it to continue I think it would be strange if it did not.

Freddie to VP S+C: You have spoken a lot about wanting to get a TV broadcasting capability for Hub Media, can you update on that?

VP S+C: I am working out how the Union can have access to existing facilities and there is a meeting soon about this and there has been some student engagement already round live web streaming.

James to VP S+C: Is the Societies Ball being rebranded to just "Embers" and what was the purpose of this?

VP S+C: It's just Embers but to avoid confusion we are still using "Socs Ball". The purpose was to create more of an identity and creating a greater appeal and sense of ownership whilst trying to upscale the Ball so a complete rebranding seemed appropriate.

Derya to all: Why are we so behind on the publication of minutes from the Board of Trustees meetings; will you chase this?

All agree to chase this.

Derya to all: I was disappointed by the BoT reply to the Lock In Student Idea; when this was raised at the Board given that it was the Student Idea with the highest number of votes so far, how did you engage with it?

VP S+C: Given the level of student engagement, we can look at moving it to a Friday and facilitate collaboration between Lock In and students to make sure it looks how students want it to.

Derya supplemental: The reasons given to move were substandard and inauthentic.

VP C+W: Why don't you submit a report on this.

Derya: The decision was taken under the false impression that the SU would lose its license, this was never in danger as the danger was losing our late night mid-week license; this is the most important issue that has not been addressed.

VP C+W: Given the amount of feeling on this and the level of push back from students, do you really think it was an easy decision or one taken without proper evidence?

VP S+H: There used to be at least one complaint a week but since the move there have been none.

Ayrden: Can you get that published?

VP S+C: Yes; the move has fulfilled its purpose.

Ayrden: The move has fulfilled UWE's purpose.

Derya supplemental: This decision was taken under a false premise as the LTSEC report shows that reports of complaints had not been sufficiently broken down and needed to be looked at further. The evidence of increasing complaints about Lock In is simply not there.

Ayrden: Complaints about student noise, with none actually coming from Cheswick Village, could have been addressed in a multitude of ways but none of these have been explored at all.

Freddie: We debunked these premises for the move at the last SCM and yet the same ones have been used to reject this Student Idea and so you have failed to take the new information we presented to you (with evidence) on board.

Ayrden: UWE will continue to receive complaints as the LTSEC report shows they could not link the incidences with Lock In and you never published the SU's complaints data.

VP C+W: I can't see how this issue can go any further after multiple votes and discussion within the BoT.

Ayrden: Is there nothing you can do?

VP C+W: Even if the Presidents block voted to move the Lock In back to Tuesday, we would be outvoted.

Derya supplemental: now we are in Semester 2, you could look at the Semester 1 data to make sure that the issues raised have been mitigate.

Ayrden: I know we are being underwritten by the University but would it not be better to have a commercially viable Lock In (on a Tuesday) and have the money the University is using to underwrite us go to student experience issues such as wellbeing services.

Ayrden to VP S+C: Was there a request to provide security for the recent Jacob Rees Mogg event?

VP S+C: All the forms were filled in correctly and put in on time; security was requested but it just wasn't there. An investigation is now underway so further comment would therefore be inappropriate.

Derya: Will the SU be providing support to PAIRS?

VP S+C: We have already reached out to PAIRS and met with the committee who were overwhelmed by the media attention; they are now doing well and their society profile has been raised.

Derya: Could there have been more support for this society and other societies with statement writing and welfare?

VP S+C: The issue here was that the vent happened on a Friday and the office was closed over the weekend; we are looking at our weekend support.

Ayrden to all: Can provide an explanation as to where the SU President is?

VP C+W: I won't insult you by reading the SU's statement.

Ayrden supplemental: With some of the university's divisions laid bare, will efforts be made to increase the sense of community at UWE?

VP Ed: Yes, generally.

Derya supplemental: Is there a freedom of speech issue at UWE?

VP S+C: Freedom of speech was protected in this instance by allowing a controversial speaker on to campus. The disruptors were the ones who were threatening freedom of speech. The overall situation at UWE is good although nothing is perfect and we should continue to look at it holistically.

Derya: At other Sus, the organisation organises the disruption of speakers and controversial events, can you confirm that will not happen here?

VP S+C: We can confirm that.

Questioning ends.

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005: Derya reiterated the need for Council meetings to keep to time. The Secretary will work with DPC to develop solutions to address the timing issues of SCM to ensure adequate time for both Executive scrutiny and Ideas discussion. As per agreed Bye-Law changes, the DPC will also begin Executive scrutiny.