

SOAS SU Trustee Board meeting 29.07.21

Minutes & Actions

In attendance: Anna (GM & Clerk), Dideolu (from around 2:30pm) Ella, Felix, Hasan, Hisham, Khadijah, Lucia, Roza, Sara, Sabrina (Chair), Yasmin

Apologies from:

Not in attendance:

To note: The trustee's terms of office finish at the end of the academic year. The trustees in attendance at this Board meeting were the 4 outgoing and 4 incoming sabbatical officers, plus two officers elected in Autumn Term who's terms of office continue until October, and a re-elected officer continuing to next academic year. This reaches the required quoracy for decision making. A meeting at this time of year is necessary in order to sign off the budget before the beginning of the new financial year.

	For our Records	ACTIONS
Sabrina	welcomed everyone to the meeting, welcomed Khadijah as a new trustee. Reminded of the safer spaces policy & confidentiality of papers.	
Sabrina	We have reached quoracy. No apologies. Checked conflict of interests – none.	
Sabrina	There are 2 items for decision – risk register and budget for 21/22. These are closed papers in terms of staffing related decisions.	
Sabrina	Board approved minutes of previous Trustee Board meeting (March 21). Noted action log. All actions completed, with the exception of final agreement on new executive officer positions to be elected in Autumn. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital transformation – we have updated our website for academic year 21/22, with thanks to Jack DiFrancesco who led this work Incorporation – Anna making progress on creating the new constitution ready to be signed off Housing crisis UGM motion – taken for discussion to Director's Group. SOAS have agreed to create a new accommodation strategy Annual Report has been published 	Outstanding Actions: to review officer positions in light of UGM motions, finalise role descriptions in preparation for Autumn Elections
	Decisions	
Sabrina	Paper 1: Risk Register & Top 10 Risks Chair introduced the first paper: we need to determine our key risks and mitigations for the new academic year. This is particularly important as we return to delivering on campus.	
Anna	Set out timeline for our planning. We negotiate our grant from SOAS as part of their budgeting timeline, and this is signed off in July and we're informed of our award. We then have to create a budget for 21/22 to start at the beginning of our financial year in August, to be approved by the Trustee Board. Before we consider and approve the budget for the year, we need to consider the key risks and controls to understand any resource implications that need to be factored into the budget. The context of the challenges	

	<p>we're facing next year and what we need to put into our operational plans should inform the decisions on our budget.</p> <p>I have updated the Risk Register (shared as part of the papers for this meeting) listing all of our current risks and actions we're taking to mitigate the risks.</p> <p>I have also highlighted our top 10 key risks, based on the risk score from the register (also shared as a paper for this meeting).</p> <p>Anna noted updates on our Return to Campus plans. Overall things have moved more slowly with delays to lifting of lockdown. We have carried out most of the steps in the plan and reached where we were expecting to be. We're starting to return to make use of the offices, we've opened the snack shop, delivered Officer Induction in a blended way, and Sports teams have been playing indoors & outdoors. Society activity has remained online. It is quiet on campus and the snack shop is not making surplus, however the grant from SOAS earlier in the year is supporting us to keep the shop open in order to provide food & drink on campus. Coffee Pod is not yet opened as there is not enough people on campus to make this worthwhile. Bar is not open – the cellar has severe disrepair which means we cannot access this. We are in the process of negotiating with SOAS around the repairs. Looking at options to enable us to open for September.</p> <p>We are planning for a 'blended' freshers programme, unless there are any national restrictions that prevent this. We'll be delivering activity on campus and some online events to include students who can't be on campus. Expecting freshers fair to be in person.</p> <p>Noting covid risks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covid impact on campus delivery – mitigations including safety measures, outbreak management plans • Poor quality/failure to deliver due to national restrictions – mitigations including plan B online alternatives • Commercial income impacted if students don't come to campus or don't want to socialise – mitigations including agreeing a conservative budget, putting covid safety measures in place in our spaces, regular re-forecasting of the budget with expenditure controls • Delivery of services where staff don't feel comfortable returning to campus – agree safety measures with staff, identify priority delivery activities 	
Felix	Is there any risk of disrepair in any of our other spaces?	
Anna	<p>No disrepair, however there are challenges around spaces. Sports storage has been lost, and don't have an agreed replacement at the moment. The Russel Room is out of action (because of sports storage), have also lost basement gym space due to SOAS heating programme.</p> <p>I have identified our space requirements to SOAS (Director of Estates &</p>	

	<p>Chief Operating Officer), and this is being considered as part of campus space change programme.</p> <p>We need to make sure SOAS keeps this on the agenda recognising the importance of providing suitable space for students' extra-curricular and social needs</p>	
<p>Anna</p>	<p>Outlined top 10 risks: these are determined based on risk scores from the risk register.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in income from commercial trading – we are planning to open up trading, have created a conservative budget against this. Proposing that we start up the Finance Sub-Committee (as set out in the constitution) to keep a close eye on the finances this year. I have budgeted in some of the Finance Manager's wages to the commercial budget so that the FM is supporting commercial trading. Opening up new trading through coffee pod. We are already dealing with this challenge. • Temporary closure of commercial outlets – as above. We need to be looking towards re-building our financial reserves to buffer against any future closures, this is factored into our budget for this year. Planning around alternative income generation – something to involve the Finance Sub-Committee with. • Freeze/reduction in SOAS grant funding – we have already had our grant award confirmed. Our grant has been retained at 19/20 levels. • External economic factors – we need to understand what's happening in the outside world and do regular financial forecasting, build our reserves. • Governance – lack of understanding of governance & democracy of the Union. Creating a comms strategy, overhauling website, increasing access through online activities. We need to create a strategy involving members in the development of a future plan to ensure Union relevance. Noted the recent National Student Survey outcome (Q26), showing positive movement in satisfaction with the SU. We need to use this to demonstrate to SOAS and our members that we are representative and relevant. • Power of General Manager & accountability to the Board. We are planning to carry out a governance review, look at officer and trustee roles and structures • Health & Safety of students and staff in our spaces – we need to write down and approve H&S procedures. We have covid safety measures in place and risk assessment processes in place • Decreased participation in the SU – hybrid freshers programme, updated website, focus on increasing participation. We need to measure & monitor participation and feedback. • Damaged relationship with SOAS management – we've put relationship agreement in place, extending our relationships beyond Director's Group, demonstrating improvements in student voice 	<p>Set up and run Finance Sub-Committee for 21/22</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not having the right resources to achieve our plans – we need a clear strategy & plan and link this with budgets and staff objectives 	
Lucia	Reduction in income from commercial trading – feel there is a discrepancy in SOAS’ measures and national restrictions. Are we going to need people to wear facemasks in the bar as across campus?	
Anna	There is no obligation to have facemasks in the bar, it is a well ventilated space. The gvmt have moved the responsibility for safety decisions to the institutions. We will have a risk assessment for our spaces & events – this will be shared with SOAS for note	
Ella	In our Risk Register there is a risk relating to strike action, it is possible this will be a risk for this year.	Include latest risk of strike action as a current risk in the register
Sara	Noted the way these papers have been presented in the meeting and requested clearer way of setting out the risks	
Anna	Noted that papers weren’t sent out to all members early enough, apologised for how this made this conversation more difficult.	
Yasmin	What should we be considering for this decision?	
Anna	From your perspective, do these seem to be the right risks, and the things we need to be prioritising, are we proposing the correct actions to mitigate?	
Felix	Noted strained relations with SOAS – is there a risk of the SU no longer being invited into committees etc?	
Anna	The risk is more around being listened to in those spaces. We’ve made some good progress in some ways – relationship development with provost, signed off relationship agreement, opened up channels of communication. However, we have also had the fall out with the Director, and withdrew from SOAS Trustee Board. I don’t foresee SOAS preventing student representation in committees, however we need to build some trust so that we actually get heard and are able to be influential as representatives. Need to be able to balance taking a firm position with being able to have some impact.	
Sara	Thinking about when the Trustees have faced challenges this year – what happens if there is potential external legal proceedings and media attention, reputational damage and legal action? This needs to be included	
Anna		To add the legal action and media risk to register, assess and identify level of risk.

Sabrina	<p>Took a vote on whether to approve the top 10 risks and actions as set out in the paper</p> <p>TB Approved this decision – 9 approved, 2 did not vote</p>	
Anna	<p>Paper 2: 21/22 Budget</p> <p>You need to scrutinise the budget and how we are allocating our resources. I will set out the overall picture on our approach and decisions that have been made.</p> <p>We have improved our non-commercial/charity budgeting in the last year, however as we were mostly not trading we haven't tested our commercial budgeting process.</p> <p>SOAS have put in place a 3-year budget and operating plan. We proposed a 3-year budget & grant request to SOAS. I started with a full cost recovery budget, asking SOAS to cover the full costs of running the SU without any commercial trading income as we do not have certainty in this area for next year. This was rejected so I put in a second request, reducing the budget across all areas to reach a figure more close to previous grant awards, reducing approx. £200k from the final amount. This was also rejected, I put in a 3rd version of the request. SOAS rejected this and just awarded us the amount of grant they awarded in 19/20.</p> <p>This is very challenging for us because SOAS' grant contribution is our only secure and certain funding.</p> <p>It usually costs approximately £600k to run the charity side of the Union. I have had to put together a budget that fits within the grant money that SOAS have awarded us. I have managed to put together a budget that doesn't require any significant staff restructuring, beyond the closure of SOAS Radio (affecting the Radio Manager role).</p> <p>I've done 2 versions of the budget, 1 with the Bar open and 1 with the Bar closed.</p> <p>In both versions of the budget the commercial income would make up the deficit in the Grant to cover the costs of running the charity.</p> <p>Activities cost £36k more than the awarded grant Support/operational overheads cost £35k more than the awarded grant</p> <p>In both versions of the commercial budgets we are expecting enough surplus to cover these costs. I have moved some of our staffing costs into the commercial budget, reducing the costs on the grant side.</p> <p>We have prepared a conservative commercial budget, expecting around 50% of our normal trade levels. We're reducing staffing costs running on a lean staff team, including not replacing the Bar Manager role immediately, with the Commercial Manager directly managing the bar.</p> <p>I still don't feel entirely confident in this surplus level at this point, especially after 2 years of not trading. I am recommending that we don't commit to spending this surplus beyond covering the deficit in the basic charity functions. We can reforecast around December 21, after a term of trading and activities, so that we can see more clearly where we are.</p>	

	We are budgeting for reductions in our activities, events and student group budgets, and to close the Radio. We are trying a few last efforts to try and get funding for the Radio but not budgeted for this as it's not looking likely.	
Ella	The incoming Co-Presidents have discussed and would like us to look into discontinuing NUS affiliation in order to put the money into events, liberation history months.	
Lucia	The cost of NUS affiliation is more than most of our activities areas – governance, democracy, campaigns etc.	
Access Break		
Sabrina	Do we need to discuss the possibility of	
Anna	<p>I don't think we have the full facts to make a final decision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do we need a membership vote to disaffiliate? • Impact on other areas if we disaffiliate – how does this impact on the NUS trading consortium, income generation through Totum Cards 	We can take out the NUS affiliation fee from the budget until we find out the facts and make the decision
Sabrina	Is this on a yearly basis? Is this a one-off decision or long-term decision. I don't think we have all the information to make this decision today.	
Lucia	This is part of the unrestricted budget, so I think we can make the decision later based on the full information.	
Anna		Anna to find out and share full information on NUS with the Trustee Board to make a decision on NUS affiliation.
Yasmin	Look at Fresher & Events budgets and Student Group budgets – I think that the proposed budgets in these areas look ok. We just need to make sure the controls are in place and adhered to. For example, what are the consequences for society overspend?	
Lucia	We think these figures look ok, we think campaigns might need to be a bigger budget.	
Anna	<p>Affiliation includes BUCS (Sports) so NUS affiliation is not the full amount. Campaigns is usually an underspent budget, there's not much that people spend in this area. I would say freshers, events etc is the priority in order to grow participation.</p> <p>Societies budget – we need to inform student groups about their budgets soon. We could put in place a second budget window for term 2, so that we know what level of spending societies need.</p>	

Hisham	Societies submit budgets at registration – can we stagger the access to the money across the terms?	
Anna	One of our challenges with student group financial controls is that societies don't read the information we share. We need to communicate more clearly about the money available, and ensure that societies understand what they can spend on	
Lucia	We have low levels of society registrations so far, this may reduce the demand for funding in this area.	
Felix	Will we need to take NUS affiliation to a UGM?	
Anna	I'm not certain, my action is to find out this information.	
Sabrina	Took a vote on approving the budget set out in the paper. TB approved the paper 10 approved, 1 did not vote.	
Anna	General Manager's Report No questions on the report.	