

SOAS SU Trustee Board meeting 03.11.21

Minutes & Actions

In attendance: Anna (GM & Clerk), Lucia RP (Chair), Alfie, Lena, Ellora, Krizzel, Jacynthe, Ella, Hisham, Maxine, Anika, Khadija, Anna L (arrived for 2nd half & voting)

Apologies from: Arianna, Mahek, Felix,

Not in attendance:

	For our Records	ACTIONS
Lucia	welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions of newly elected officers. Reminded of the safer spaces policy & confidentiality of papers.	
Lucia	We have reached quoracy. Noted apologies. Checked conflict of interests – none.	
Lucia	<p>Board approved minutes of previous TB. Noted action log – outstanding actions</p> <p>1. Incorporation of the SU, constitution re-draft has been completed looking for legal advice to check it through. 2. Accommodation strategy conversation has been taken forward with the new SOAS Chief Operating Officer (COO).</p> <p>Reports on completed actions – 1. Part-time officer positions put forward in UGM motions were added into the Autumn elections. 2. Anna & Kai setting up the finance committee to discuss the 20/21 accounts which are currently being audited. Have had some expressions of interest and will discuss in the second round of Trustee training following these recent elections. 3. Updated risk register and risk assessments, included strike action as a current risk. 4. Reviewed the NUS affiliation fee, Anna & Lucia met with NUS to discuss the membership benefits & sabbatical officers decided to continue this membership for the year.</p> <p>Noted email decision (decision made without a meeting) to approve bank account signatories changes following change of sabbatical officers.</p>	
	Decisions	
Lucia	<p>Paper 1 : Governance Review Proposal</p> <p>We will present the proposal and have a discussion, explore the issues, challenges & opportunities.</p>	
Anna	<p>We've had conversations over the years about how SOAS SU is run, from the Trustee Board to Officer roles and how they work, to the make-up of Exec Committee, to the way decisions are made, how UGMs work.</p> <p>We've reached a point where we need to make some proper decisions. We've been through many years where we've evolved our structures in a more ad-hoc way. We have not held a full review to consider where we've ended up – we haven't stopped to review whether the way that we work makes us an effective organisation, effective at organising and making change, at representing students.</p> <p>There have been a number of pieces of work, research, UGM motions that have come in across the last few years suggesting that we need to make</p>	

changes – 2 examples being the KPMG governance review in 2018 and the recent UGM motion for a new Co-President role. We need to have conversations as a Trustee Board, as an Exec and with our student membership about how we actually make the changes that need to be made.

The history of the 2018 review has been detailed within the papers, it tells us something about how the Union works. The previous TB decided to hold a referendum asking all students to vote on a new Trustee Board structure, and there was then a UGM motion overturning the referendum because some students felt the referendum hadn't been held in accordance with the constitution. It's bureaucracy on top of bureaucracy just to make some change to enable us to get rid of some bureaucracy! It feels like that's the way. We're stuck spending our energy & effort on the processes instead of actually having impact.

There's more detail in the paper in terms of the background & context.

What we're suggesting is that we need to do a governance review – what we want from the Trustee Board is a conversation about what we think the review should look like, what the scope would be, what questions are we trying to answer, what are we aiming to achieve, and to get broad approval for us to do this piece of work.

It may require some resources to be put into it. We also need to make sure that this is the direction for the Union that you want. If there is a sense from the Board that you don't want change then there's no point in taking this review forward.

The 3 questions we need the Board to consider

1. Does the Board approve the decision to carry out the review?
2. Are you happy with the scope of the review?
3. Are you happy with the approach for carrying it out?

This is the beginning of the conversation, we're not trying to make decisions today on the outcome of the review, just how we want to do it.

In the paper there is a series of examples of other SU structures and governance. I haven't chosen these as examples that are the best, or ones I'm suggesting for us, but they do show that there are lots of variations and ideas on how to do SU governance.

EG Greenwich SU have non-portfolio officer roles based on the manifestos of the officers. Leeds SU have a different approach to UGMs/student decision making. They have forums, groups and boards that make decisions in different ways, with different people involved. They have tested out the citizens assembly approach to engage with 'non-involved' students.

I've highlighted some of the interesting ideas out there.

I think a review would be carried out in 2 parts. 1. To review the officer roles (full time and part time) – what is the role of a student officer?

What should be a full time/paid role and what should be a voluntary role? What kind of representation do students want & need? What is the role of a trustee and does a trustee & officer have to be the same people? It's looking at the roles and how they work. 2. To

	<p>review the decision-making structures. What do students want to have a say about? What kinds of decisions are made and where are they made? Who wants & needs to have a say in those decisions? Who currently accesses decision making processes and how do we make them more accessible? And within that, what's the role of a general meeting and are there other ways for decisions to be made.</p>	
Lucia	<p>Our Union has gone through a lot and in the past years we haven't taken a step back & reviewed ourselves and asked whether we're working effectively. Our governance are the mechanisms we use to make decisions and we need to understand how this affects the work that we do. If we had more effective governance all of the things we could accomplish without having to deal with the bureaucracy. I do think we need this review so that we can be more operationally effective and also making us more effective in truly representing and advocating for students. Some of what we do in our processes like general meetings, is that the right way of getting student feedback, could we represent students better? There are lots of different models to learn from. I feel like this is a good opportunity to take a step back, think about the history of the Union & think about how we can make it better. In terms of the areas we want to cover we've divided into looking at our roles, who makes up the Union executive, how can we make us more open & accessible to students, and also the other area which is about the way we make decisions, are UGMs really that effective as a decision making body? Are there other ways that would work better for our community & our environment?</p> <p>Other more operational things to consider Who are we going to ask for help with the review? I would recommend that we approve starting the process of carrying out a governance review – we are falling behind other Unions.</p>	
Anika	<p>We have our UGMs on Teams? (Lucia – yes, you can find all the mins on the website) What about using private YouTube live to make UGMs more accessible to people? What about a live stream discussion at the end of the UGM to summarise the minutes on insta or YT?</p>	
Lucia	<p>UGMs are already live streamed on Zoom. The question today goes beyond UGMs, UGMs are an example of something that could work a bit better. This is definitely something we could discuss in Exec. We're prepping for the next UGM at Friday's Exec meeting.</p> <p>We're asking if a governance review is something we want to approve as a Union, it's a more longterm process in terms of thinking about the structures of the Union</p>	
Khadi	<p>I think that we should approve the governance review because the UGM motion for a Black Co-Pres was voted for by students in March. This was the second time this motion was proposed. The first time it was proposed it was put into action as the Black Student Support Coordinator staff role. This role was meant to be there to put black student issues as a top priority for the Union. For a lot of officers, for eg anti-racism, POC officer, if a black person would take on a role, even for myself I am seen as a black person within the</p>	

	<p>SU. A lot of students will come and tell me what’s happening to them, and I can’t do enough- I don’t have much jurisdiction to do stuff. I feel like this motion did not just come about because of the events of 11th March, it was exacerbated why it was important to have this role.</p> <p>The motion is available on the website. It proposed that no-one at a full time level has made black student issues a priority. Black students face anti-black racism on campus, discrimination, micro-aggressions, in-direct discrimination. Students are not adequately represented across the school’s curriculum and reading lists, the curriculum is presented through white epistemologies. The motion stated that this would allow better representation, allow time & resources to be directed to other responsibilities. The Fire Habib campaign was predominantly led by black students, with around 4 active students plus alumni. It was a long process in terms of writing statements, forming solidarity. The process itself has been draining on those involved. Art & the African Mind were trying to raise complaints about racism in the classroom & members were being threatened for access into their emails, during a major deadline. I feel like having got this motion passed, and having this conversation about the governance review, this is a good opportunity. This is work that would involve looking at all of the roles- it’s interesting looking at my role in relation to the other Co-President roles.</p> <p>I want a discussion about this role. What would it look like to have this role? On the premise of the work it took to pass this motion and the continuing afriphobia within SOAS I would like this review to be approved</p>	
Lucia	That was helpful information, the motion details can be found on the website. Let us know if you have any other questions about the context and background.	
Anna	Direct point – we’re stuck in a place where we don’t have enough money and resources to keep adding officer roles, and I also don’t think just adding more officer roles (we’ve done the same with part time officer roles last year) – we need to ask have we got the right officer roles? It’s important that our students have told us they want this officer role, so we have to look at all the roles. We can’t just say ‘we can’t do it, let’s move on’ – we need to stop and look at how we make this happen. That’s part of what this governance review would allow us to do. Look at all the officer roles, what is the priority? what needs representation? what is an officer there to do anyway?	
Lucia	This is also what students are telling us about our own roles and how we can make the Union function in a better way.	
Ella	The solution needs to be thinking more than just introducing more & more officer roles. We already have a big exec – good in some ways as we have lots of different groups represented, but there’s a limit on how many roles we can have and we need to think more strategically about what roles are necessary and about how we use representation. It’s a limited model in practice, so how do we make it work within the structures that we have available to us. That’s why I think a governance review would help us to answer those questions. To give some more context – 2 of the Co-	

	<p>Presidents sit on the SOAS trustee board, so are trustees of both the Union & of SOAS. And that in itself can be a conflict of interest in the Trustee sense, and makes it hard to navigate for the officers and puts constraints on what you're able to do – the example of this was that 2 of the sabbatical officers last year had to step down from the SOAS trustee board following the events of March 11th. That's also something we need to be aware of & think about. That conversation we're also having with the SOAS trustee board at the moment about the SU involvement on the SOAS board.</p> <p>I would vote in favour of a governance review for those reasons</p>	
Lucia	<p>An important point is the sustainability of the current model – for how long can we continue to function with this structure since it causes problems elsewhere</p>	
Ella	<p>It's also about whether or not everyone who is elected onto Exec should also be Trustee. Most if not all people do not run for Exec to be a trustee of the Union. A lot of other Unions don't use this model. They often have external/lay trustees which also means there's continuity because we don't have that. There's often a complete handover to new people, makes it difficult to make decisions and for people to have the right knowledge to be a trustee. The governance review would also be thinking about that and looking at different ways to do that and what would work for students involved in Exec and the sustainability of the Union.</p>	
Maxine	<p>If you become a trustee then you're part of the charity and there are laws around what a charity can and can't do. I think that's an important point to think about. The governance review sounds good, I think especially with this issue of what roles we need, what long standing roles we need to fully represent our students. Obviously we'll need some way of having a dialogue with as much of the student body as possible, that's something from my experience of how the SU operates it's not something SU's are necessarily good at – having many people turn up for elections, UGMs etc.</p> <p>That is something quite structural. Not only do we need some form of dialogue with students in creating the roles but also in how the roles operate. Especially for the liberation officer roles, there needs to be some way of being able to communicate with that body of students in a consistent way – that would help increase the accountability of the role.</p>	
Lucia	<p>These are important points, particularly around the roles of the part time officers. Why do we have to be trustees & being a charity puts constraints on what we can do. You don't stop being a trustee when you're campaigning for example, and that can create issues. About the liberation roles it's really important – how do we make the union more accessible, open and democratic. This is why the governance review should give us the opportunity to imagine new spaces and parameters in which we can structure.</p>	
Anna	<p>Really agree about dialogue. The mistake we made last time was to go to a referendum. Here is our proposal on the structure, do you want it yes or no? The students felt it wasn't enough conversation for us to know, how do we make this decision. That's not the way to have this conversation. What I would like to see from a governance review is a creative project, that we</p>	

	<p>find lots of different ways to engage as many students as possible in a conversation to find out what people need. It's that depth of a review that's required. We could easily go to another Union and copy a structure/model and bring it to our students and ask if they want it. There'll be some students who couldn't care less, the Union is irrelevant to me. There'll be some students that want to keep things traditional and un-changing. I don't think that engages people properly – we actually want to use this review to find out what students want to make the Union belong to them and be something they can make decisions through. That's how I imagine this piece of work.</p>	
Lucia	<p>All of these points go in the same direction which is we have to look back at ourselves and think about what we have to change in order to become better, more accessible, a more student-led Union. How can we better facilitate and advocate for students in that space, what kind of structures we provide for students to take on our Union.</p>	
Lucia	<p>Asked for any further questions & comments. We will move to an access break – after the break we will come back to the questions from the proposal and make the decisions we need to make.</p>	
	<p>Took an access break at this point. There is cake in Senate House.</p>	
Lucia	<p>It seems that the conversation was leading to a consensus. If anyone feels we're not there and need more conversation let me know.... Otherwise we can move forward to voting on approving.</p>	
	<p>Unanimously approved Governance Review proposal.</p>	<p>Take forward the Governance Review as per the proposal paper</p>
Anna	<p>General Manager's Report The GM will always report to each Trustee Board meeting. The role of the GM is to run the charity, the organisation, our staff team, the admin, risk, budgets. The GM should be reporting on the performance of the organisation, the finances, are there any legal issues or risks you need to consider. This report would usually be for information and allow you to bring questions to the Board meeting. Because of the content of this report I am giving an opportunity for further questions or thoughts if you have them. My report has some general information on the performance of the Union from the beginning of the year. Last year was obviously a difficult year, with staff on furlough, campus closed, no students around etc. So it was nice to be able to report on the start of the year, things have been great coming back onto campus. We've seen more student participation than we'd expected, there is signs that students want to be involved. It's been good for the team to be back on campus. I think we need further thought on what we can do for students who aren't yet back on campus. I've included some information on what the team have been doing. The big messages are that we secured the additional Enough is Enough funding, and brought in a new programme coordinator on a three year contract to support the</p>	

	<p>project. We've delivered the consent workshops and are now able to take the project forward.</p> <p>Since I started 2.5 years ago we've been seeking new funding for SOAS Radio to enable it to stay open – it looks like we've found some options. [This information affects staff so is confidential]</p> <p>Finances – we've just had our last year's draft accounts (20/21), we will discuss them in more detail when the audit is done. It looks as if we've pretty much able to break even, which is what we were aiming for, we didn't overspend the small amount of income we did have coming in. Our commercial services were closed for most of the year, it was a real challenge. In the previous year we lost £200k, so being break-even this year is a good sign. At the beginning of the year we've opened the new Café and the bar/shop are re-opened. It's been a bit of a slow start and there's still worries about socialising in the pandemic, but so far the finances are looking where we expected in the budget.</p> <p>Finally – I am leaving the position of General Manager this year. I don't have a confirmed leaving date but it will be soon. I am employed directly by SOAS, so I have to discuss the recruitment with SOAS. I'm in the process of looking at this with SOAS and will bring forward the proposals. We are considering interim options to carry out some of our big pieces of work (incorporation, governance review) – there's some quite complex pieces of work to do, and these challenges need some experienced support.</p> <p>I will report back to you on the process, and there will be opportunities for student involvement in the recruitment process, for example an engagement panel. It is good for you to think about what you want out of this role – I recommend you have that conversation in Exec.</p>	
Anna	I have submitted the updated Risk Register, but won't go into it in more detail today as we had a long look at this in July and there's not much that has changed for note.	