



Minutes

BT-203-M1

An electronic meeting of the LSU Trustee Board was held on the 21 May 2020 at 17:00 via an online meeting platform.

1. PRESENT:

Andy Doyle (Chair), Salome Dore (President), Matthew Young, Lauren Durkin, Darcey Dunne, Ana-Maria Bilciu, Amy White, and Joshua Hope.

In attendance: Trevor Page (Union Director), Maria Turnbull-Kemp, Jo Gregory-Brough, Liam Davis, Alan Williams, Nicky Conway, Manuel Alonso (Associate Chief Operating Officer, Loughborough University), and Sue Lucas (Clerk).

2. APOLOGIES:

Tracey Bingham (resigned), Fraser Barclay, Richard Taylor, and David Kiddie.

3. REGISTER OF INTERESTS

No updates recorded.

4. TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

Alan Williams omitted from those present, minutes approved following amendment.

5. TO RECEIVE UPDATES ON ACTIONS RAISED

6. TO RECEIVE MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

- a) To receive a financial update
Received

7. TO RECEIVE AND NOTE REPORTS FROM THE UNION DIRECTOR

a) COVID-19 update and discussion

TP presented a report on the difficult process of locking down the Campus and Students' Union and outlined the issues faced by the Union in surviving lockdown. There are two issues that need addressing, firstly financial and secondly the student experience which needs to bounce back as quickly as possible after lockdown. In terms of finance, we have lost almost an entire term's income and crucially we look set to lose the 1st term of the new academic year, with the possibility of the venue not reopening until December/January. The financial implications for the Union will be the loss of income from sales of platinum cards (c£250k) and the loss of tenants who are struggling to make their rents and may not survive. Our current monthly running costs are c£370k which are predominately staffing costs. MTK has looked at both the known and potential incomes and it is assumed that if this expenditure continues the Union will run out of money. The University have approved the option of the Union taking the 2nd half Block Grant but that would only delay outcomes until Easter 2021. Therefore, I ask the Board to consider the worst-case scenarios and to discuss how we start to build from here: - Things we could and should do; look at our long-term cost base and then align more appropriately to our income flow. A longer-term project would be to look at our staffing costs but to be assured of the Union getting through this next period we need to look at short-term savings. MTK will exhaust all the furlough options available by keeping most of our staff on furlough for as long as possible. We will look to remove further costs where we can through causal wages and any discretionary spending. The Union has taken a £50k, 12month interest-free

'Bounce Back' loan from the bank and there is potentially £50k from our insurers. Other options would be to take out a cash injection loan, offsetting the problem for a few months, although we would need to repay the loan. We have the option to sell off assets, but we would need to address our cost base.

Sabbatical Officers will return to work on 20th July with the Officers elect coming in from the 27th July although, they will be paid from the 13th July as stated during their election. Work has been carried out on a one-way plan for the Union building and there will be staggered starts for team members. Our plan is to start opening services gradually during August as students start to move back onto campus. The Union will be opening for Freshers, but social distancing will apply. AWi is working on ideas but it is impossible to have a socially distanced night club. We continue to be hopeful that Government will ease lockdown and we will continue to work with our colleagues from the University. AWh asked TP in terms of prioritising services, would those offering mental and emotional support for new students and those that are returning to a different environment, be a priority. TP responded noting that the Union has continued to fulfill its charitable aims throughout lockdown, these have included welfare, activities and online Rag events adding that these will continue to be a priority, but we also need to prioritise money.

AD welcomed Manuel Alonso, Associate Chief Operating Officer, Loughborough University to provide the University perspective for the autumn term. The University are working on a plan based on a government alert level of 3 which will see some relaxed measures on social distancing and with a fair wind this could be reduced to a 2 where there is some residue social distancing. We will be welcoming students back on campus with social distance measure in place although we are still considering how this will work in halls of residence. We are in conversation with the Union regarding Freshers and what this may look like, possibly small clusters of activity or online. The University are looking to publish their final position in the next 2-3 weeks - a possible blended model, running smaller teaching groups and online but beyond that we are looking at what happens if we are still in lockdown in Sept/Oct but we are keen to offer a positive student experience. AWh asked whether the University have seen evidence of students deferring this year. MA's response was that they wouldn't expect to see it at this point but if we were to see it, it would be later in August. We are also looking at the scenarios of between 25-75% hit on our usual intake, hard for us to know how that will go. Our pre-sessional courses have been shifted online starting on the 22nd June and this will be our first barometer of international student numbers, currently looking okay but would be a game changer.

AD summarised the reports to the Board emphasising their responsibility for the financial wellbeing of the Union, it's requirement to fulfill its charitable aims and the real challenges it faces to provide a student experience to the cohort of students joining the University this year. Whilst some of the Union's funding is guaranteed and comes from the University, the majority of the Union's income comes from its commercial outlets. AD stated that the least the Board should be asking for is for management to provide on a degree scale of unpalatable, what else can we do bearing in mind that all the easy options have been exhausted. AD asked the Board for comment:

MY raised a concern for support of student staff members noting that he accepted that they are casual staff but many of them rely on their income from the Union to stay afloat. TP responded by bringing the Board's attention to the fact that the Union furloughed 500+ staff which included all student staff for the 3rd term adding that student staff are highly valued, and any layoff of casual staff would be a very temporary measure.

DD asked for a reconsideration of the week allocated for the completion of projects by the sabbatical officers prior to handover, stating that this was not long enough. MTK responded, this has not been an easy decision, hours have been spent working out the best possible handover and safeguarding the future of the Union. AD suggested that SD and TP initiate discussion with the University about a possible partnership which would allow staff to return earlier and offset the massive cost associated with opening the Union building.

8. AGENDA ITEMS – FUTURE PLANS

a) Presidents update

SD presented an overview of her report. There are currently four officers working to ensure that students are being supported and that we minimise the likelihood of problems occurring. AMB with the help of NC and the rest of the executive continue to raise student's concerns with the University's senior management team. MY has been busy with countless welfare posts on social media which include a weekly video, virtual tea and talk sessions and 'bedtime stories'. Working with the University we have jointly launched an emergency fundraising appeal to support students who are experiencing financial hardship as a result of Covid-19. We have had a positive outcome raising in the region of



£40-50k. LDu has been working to ensure the completion of the AU club committee elections, exploring the options for offline training and everything BUCS related whilst I've personally been focusing on the concerns raised by students and following those concerns up with our university colleagues to achieve a successful outcome. One such concern was regarding hall rent payments for term 3. We also took the opportunity to reach out to local letting agents and private landlords but the response was as we expected. Some of the other projects we have been working on have been elections and appointments of committees for the incoming sabbaticals, moving all section award events online and Freshers.

AWH expressed her surprise at how extensive the support has been for students and asked if we have a specific crisis communication plan in place to make sure we are communicating to different audiences in different ways. JGB responded, we have had a greatly reduced team and have focused predominantly on getting updates out where they are relevant. We have tried to give an overall view but in the main we have tended to have 1-1 communication with students. At the start of lockdown, the Union inbox became the central point of call to make sure that emails weren't going unanswered. To date we have dealt with over 700 emails on a wide range of student issues. Earlier this week a few of my team returned from furlough to focus on the direction of comms - we will be putting out a broader concept. JGB with liaison with AWH further on crisis communication.

AD echoed AWH's thoughts adding that it was impressive how the Union had continued virtually in difficult circumstances. AD suggested that there may be some work to be done with the University to demonstrate the ongoing support being provided to students and how we are fulfilling our charitable aims. AD recognised the huge effort made by those not furloughed to make it work.

b) Future of the Union

TP agreed that he would revisit the question regarding the timing of the sabbatical's return but noted that there were more considerations. I don't know the numbers around the sabbatical team, but we would need to find that cost from somewhere else and think hard about what the payoffs are going to be. The things that we can control are; the overall headcount today and over the next few months, the use of student staff and the opening the buildings. We also have the option to sell off assets, in particular, the nursery and possibly the land we sit on, but I would need guidance from the Board on the speed at which we progress on this. AD, I think the Board's direction to the management team would be; nothing is off the table and you should advance all things but what we shouldn't do is make decisions at this time. We would ask the management team not to go away and make decisions to either sell land, sell the nursery, close something down or restructure. I think we would like the options to come back to the Board, which is flexible, and if we need to meet more frequently, or as a special meeting, that is entirely possible so that we give the Union the best chance of getting through and weathering this storm.

TP asked the Board to discuss and make their views known on the what the priorities of the Union should be. AD, particularly in the light of potentially a Freshers' intake coming into the weirdest situation in the world, moving away from home for the first time and not having what has historically been the norm. MA, the University have already been doing some work to revamp induction and how we dealt with students from A level results day onwards. The student experience this year is going to be unlike any other experience. We will focus our package on what you're going to get rather than what we are not going to give you - positively packaging the opportunities. LDa, I think one of the things that we have got an opportunity to do on the positive side, is potentially spending a little more time focusing on our representative membership organisation which is exceptional but during Freshers gets drowned out by our commercial arm.

DD questioned the decision to potentially furlough MY when much of the conversation has been around the welfare of our students, how will we provide those provisions if this is the case. TP, following discussion with SD, if we decide on the approach it will be for a matter of a month. We are already posting welfare content regularly; we want to continue doing that and supporting volunteers. We also need to prioritise supporting students in academic fields which is one of our primary functions and one that we are tested on by the Government.

JH with assessments being placed online is there an expectation that the number of appeals are going to dramatically increase and therefore the need for more educational support. NC, the number of cases we are going to see over the

summer is a real unknown, there might be an increase in appeals but it's hard to say. The University have worked on putting a safety net in place and if successful we might not see much of an increase. We are working with the University to ensure the comms are really clear so that students can see how it has been calculated. There's a concern over the number of academic misconduct cases we might see through remote assessment; potential for sharing answers to exams with each other remotely but again it's a bit of an unknown. LDa, we have brought back from furlough a number of Nicky's team and looked at the scenario but if the number reach X how is this manageable. Potentially when we get to August, when we might see a peak in cases, we will need to bring more of her team back. In August the cost of staffing will have increased by 11 Officers so we will need to follow the data and prioritise other members of my team returning. JH, is there a level of flexibility, could staff from other departments help. NC, there is a level of training and knowledge required to be able to deliver advice successfully, so this wouldn't be an option. In advance of the lockdown we have been working on frontloading the advice that we provide to students as much as possible. We are currently working with JGB on a number of FAQ's to try and provide as much self-help material as we can for those who may just need light touch support, so that we can concentrate on those who need in-depth support. JGB, over the last 10wks we have seen a shift in the type of comms students are choosing to engage with. Our 'fun stuff' that normally gets nibbled by everyone significantly dropped off but our updates on welfare and education have seen more engagement. Over the next couple of weeks my team will shift focus onto that type of area.

Action: To record and share formally with the University a structured document outlining the logic of what we have done and what we are planning to do. The document should aim to reassure them that the grant funding is being spent wisely and thoughtfully and that we are also balancing out the spectacular work people are doing in these difficult situations with great planning for the future. AW, for transparency you would typically include details of what trade-offs were made and why you made them, this would be not only be good for our relationship with the University but maybe even for some of the students - 'we decided to do this because'. MA noted that the University does not support the furloughing of the two sabbatical officers - the university feel that the grant money ought to be able to facilitate that because they are core to the Union's charitable objectives.

Staff retention scheme – LDu, on the assumption that the Government reduces its contribution toward staff pay to 60% in August, at what point do we stop subsidising staff wages to 100% TP, I would like to make a recommendation to the Board that we continue to maintain 100%, we will be able to ask staff to add value by working part-time. MTK, what we are looking at is a worst-case scenario, but we just don't know. HMRC should be publishing guidelines in the next couple of weeks. Any changes to the percentage contribution could make a significant difference to our cashflow and we will update the Board as soon as we have that information. Our plan is to have all the staff back in August but possibly not full-time as we want to take advantage of all the furlough options available. AD, despite the Government's best efforts there's been a lot of noise in the hospitality sector about opening things up and matching the furlough scheme to protect employment. MTK, realistically if furlough for hospitality is reduced to a 20% contribution by Oct this will have a huge effect on all hospitality. If the furlough scheme is worked on sectors, we will of course match this to maximise the government contribution. Once we receive confirmation from HMRC we will align our cashflow and update the Board with a clear picture. AD, I think there are two points of detail; supporting staff where removing the subsidiary feels unattractive and asking the management team, how do we make the cash go further by trying to understand some of these choices and trade-offs. This should at least be done with data. MTK, I would ask the Board to wait until early June when we will have had more advice from the Government, an updated the cashflow and know outcome of our insurance claim which we now know we can claim. We can use the updated report to steer conversations, possibly in a different direction.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

LDu asked whether the Board would be approving the points raised and discussed regarding the period of handover and the furloughing of Executive Officers. AD, The Board have provided a strong steer to management and to avoid a conflict of interest, we would not vote on something where it concerns members of the Board and those members have been involved in the discussion.

SD welcomes the Board to email her with feedback on the provision of Freshers.

AMB, we have spoken a lot about the short-term solutions for the Union, but we still need to address some of the challenges we had prior to Covid-19. SUMS, do we have any plans in terms of how we are going to solve the existing issues before the new year. JGB, to update the Board. We have been doing a lot of work with SUMS in the back ground while we've been in lockdown – the spreadsheet put forward with the logged issues has been updated and SUMS released a system update on the 4th of May which as solved a lot of issues around membership. We've had a meeting with Exchequer and SUMS to integrate finance which should alleviate those problems. I will circulate details which set development priorities and system updates. AMB, my only concern with this is that until now we have not heard of the progress being made, I think it would be helpful to have a steer from one of our exec officer group who could disseminate the information to the rest of the team. JGB, my team are working on an online package of training which covers all of the new dashboard and 'how to' and video guides, we hope to circulate that in the next couple of weeks.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

TBC