

Scrutiny Panel

Report

Monday 23 November 2020, 6.00 pm - Held via Zoom

Present

Joe Vinson, Chair of Student Council (*from **)

James Tavner, Deputy Chair of Student Council (*until ***)

Panel Members

Student Volunteers	Student Council Volunteers
Jasmin Whitehead	Beatrix Andrews
Saumya Garg	Yassar Malik
Harris Nageswaran	James Tavner
<i>Ishika Ali</i>	Joe Vinson

Apologies

Ishka Ali who was drawn for the Panel was unable to attend and sent apologies.

Cameron Storey was on leave arranged before the meeting date was set.

Welcome and Introduction

As the Chair was detained on business elsewhere, the meeting was opened by the Deputy Chair, James Tavner - the Chair to join meeting as soon as available. The Deputy Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Executive Committee Reports

The Executive Committee member's reports had been circulated in advance, together with other information on their work (Executive Committee Minutes, Policy Tracker, and Executive Team Project Plan). These were taken as read and the Executive Officers attended individually to give a five-minute presentation highlighting areas of their work, each followed by a ten-minute question and answer session.

Aphrodite Murray-Liddington Vice President Science and Engineering

Aphrodite highlighted the following points:

- Employability Project to be trialled in School of Mathematical Sciences in Semester B, also working with School of Engineering and Material Sciences.
- Cyber Security and Data Compliance modules - impressive take-up of these optional modules.

- Student Etiquette Campaign - online etiquette in conjunction with QM Academy; staff etiquette to be added.
- Taking up issue of interval between exams and start of Semester B with senior management on behalf of students in EECS.
- Re-visiting 'no detriment' policy.

Questions to Aphrodite:

Q. What are the issues and solutions being addressed by the Student Etiquette Campaign?

A. Derogatory comments in student chat, muting of lecturers by students. Also, muting student chat by lecturers and issues with technology. Clear guidance for lecturers on how to start sessions and etiquette material to show students at beginning of sessions in Semester B.

Q. Any repercussions for bad behaviour?

A. Outside of remit - need to discuss further possible strike system for removal of offenders if they impact negatively on others.

Q. Can leaving webcams off be addressed?

A. In guidance - discussion with Deans required, but need to recognise some students do not have the necessary equipment.

Q. How did you get such impressive engagement with Cyber Security and Data Compliance modules?

A. Comms from SU, S&E Board and School Forums, Newsletters in SMS and others, plus School and Course Reps and social media.

Q. What will happen if 'no detriment' policy is not accepted by the University?

A. Trying to implement last year's 'worst 30 credits' policy. However, University was praised in sector for not being as lenient as some other institutions. If proposal is rejected will seek compromise position.

Mat Robathan

Vice President Barts and The London

Mat highlighted the following points:

- SMD Survey now ready and will be published next week.
- SJT issues being addressed - no reply and so second letter sent. Extenuating circumstances not applied fairly. Petition with 1,000 plus signatures calling for other issues to be addressed.
- Spaces on campus - more required at week-ends when SU and Garrod closed. Following up with Estates and Library.

- Held meeting with Gozo Society President and Gozo Rep to clarify bedding in of new roles.
- NHS Volunteering - no further volunteers required at present. Honiton project restricted to previous volunteers.

Questions to Mat:

Q. Volunteering requests re. Covid trials and other requests appeared to have been circulated by SMD?

A. Only one trial endorsed by the School and advertised to third years within a module. Other volunteering capped at eight hours per week as education must come first.

Q. What recommendations were being made on safer campuses?

A. More about identifying issues at this stage. Campus Safety Group had been re-activated and was proving very constructive.

**(Joe joined the meeting at this point)*

Highlighted impression given on Open Days, e.g. gates closed when they should be open. Card readers to be re-programmed. Other issues raised include vehicles speeding on roads across campus, knife crime and bike safety. Responses awaited before making recommendations.

Q. What work was being done concerning reinstatement of Global Public Health course?

A. Met with Head of School and two-part approach planned - why the subject is important and what processes were followed by the University in making their decisions.

*** (Joe took the Chair at this point and James left the meeting)*

Tiana Dinard-Samuel

VP Communities

Tiana highlighted the following points:

- Islamophobia Awareness Month - event with two external organisations and panel event.
- Trans Awareness week - worked with QMUL and LGBT+ Rep, Trans Role Models.
- Working with international students and Reps – Meeting with Colin Grant every six weeks; looking at removal of £50 admin fee for instalments, meeting with Reps this week.
- University of Sanctuary (with Jack) working with QMUL and looking at how to link to the local community.
- PhDs in Pandemic – support for PhD students, working with Doctoral College.
- De-colonise - member of QMUL REAG and subgroups, including work on inclusive curriculum.

- Attended BL Anti-Racism Steering Group for first time last week.

Questions to Tiana:

Q. Has any thought been given on the effects of Brexit upon students in Malta? (Gozo Rep meeting British High Commissioner in Malta next week).

A. Met with QMUL re. UK-based students - happy to talk more about students in Malta.

Q. Do you have any plans for Disability Awareness week?

A. Not as yet - happy to be involved if asked.

Q. Were any Trans people involved in the Trans Awareness week?

A. There is currently no Trans Rep in post - met with Peach magazine and worked with University.

Q. Did you work with ME LGBT+ Rep.

A. No, they did not respond.

The Chair added that with a Trans Rep in place, hopefully there was room for improving the level of Trans engagement in the future.

Jack Juckes

Vice President Welfare and QMSU President

Jack highlighted the following points:

- Student Staff Reward Scheme - App for discounted gift cards (e.g. 2-3% at Tesco - some more). Buy discounted gift cards to spend with store. Helps Student Staff on reduced incomes.
- Good progress on staff wages with QMUL.
- Be Kind Campaign - resources, including activities were on the website together with content from Exec Officers.
- Connecting Students - bringing a number of projects together.

Questions to Jack:

Q. Will the Union be accessing the Furlough Scheme for Student Staff this time around?

A. Would like to if we could, but the University want to cover budgeted wages at this point.

Q. What is the University's reason for not allowing access to the Scheme?

A. They believe that it would be unethical because the University is able to cover the budgeted wages.

Q. How has Study Well changed given the move to more on-line learning?

A. Online study skills, online events, but sadly no puppies!

Q. Do dogs help?

A. Indirectly, by helping to relieve stress.

Q. The Union has policy on lobbying the University to change bursary payment dates - is there any news on progress with this, or with changes to the Financial Assistance Fund?

A. Not a lot of progress - issues raised with the Principal, a work in progress. A member of staff from the University's Registry is reviewing the Financial Assistance Fund and have been invited to become involved in the review.

Q. How is sitting on the Financial Assistance Fund Panel going - is it beneficial?

A. Useful to see the problems which students are facing and why. Has mostly agreed with the decisions made by the Panel on non-standard awards.

Cameron Storey

Vice President Humanities and Social Sciences

Cameron had sent apologies and was not present at the meeting.

The Chair invited questions which would be forwarded to Cameron.

Questions for Cameron:

Q. Is the response to adapting the Library search function effective enough? (*Jasmine*)

Q. Aphrodite spoke about online etiquette - have similar issues been experienced in HSS and are there any plans for similar training? (*Beatrix*)

Q. Accessibility issue - closed captioning does not work for languages. Are there any plans to address this for students with hearing difficulties? (*Beatrix*)

These questions will be forwarded to Cameron for response directly to Panel members outside of the meeting.

Shamima Akter

President

Shamima highlighted the following points:

- Working on teamwork and team dynamics in a difficult environment. Holding regular one-to-one and team meetings, facilitating relationship building within the University and filling any gaps.
- Met with the Principal, after a four month wait, focusing on Covid and plans for Semester B. The meeting was quite positive and helpful in re-defining the relationship between the Union and the University. Wants to ensure that connections were in place for successors and was focused upon building relationships for the future.

- Finances - had been overseeing conversations between the Union and the University. Had attend a training session on Finances for Trustees. The financial situation was fragile - the Union's Block Grant had been reduced by 5% (rather than an intended 20%). There were fewer students on campus than predicted and the Union was projecting a £360k deficit for the year. Restructuring was being considered. The Union's Emergency Corporate Finance Committee was meeting every two-to-three weeks to monitor cash-flow and other developments.

Questions to Shamima: *(taken in a round of three)*

Q1. Is the Union's new campaign tool designed to let students 'go it alone' or would the Executive Officers still be providing support?

Q2. How are cost cutting measures being balanced with the needs of students to access facilities?

Q3. What progress has been made on the Institutionalised Racism Campaign?

A1. Leading on student campaign support - the tool would be piloted with the Exec Team first to test the system; staff support would be brought in as required.

A2. Weekly meetings look at government guidelines, actual and anticipated space usage. Hub opening hours have been reduced due to lower usage.

A3. Research on Institutionalised Racism within the Union began last year separated into two strands – Executive Officers and Staff. Interviews with staff members were conducted by an external (DCEO of City University SU) and a report has been produced. Conducted the interviews with previous Executive Officers herself on the grounds of confidentiality, therefore was in the process of transcribing them herself. When complete, a People, Culture and Inclusion Plan would be developed.

Q. What level of financial support is currently being offered to Student Staff during lockdown?

A. For November they are being offered their budgeted wages as per the rota.

Q. Is that the Coronavirus based rota?

A. Yes - the University have underwritten circa £31k.

Q. How many staff does that cover

A. Not sure of the exact number without checking.

Q. Is a hardship scheme being considered?

A. This is being investigate with the CEO.

Q. Can this information be provided to the Panel at the next meeting?

A. Yes

Q. You seem to be spending a lot of time managing the Executive Team, is this something that could be covered by a staff member to free up time for you to pursue other projects?

A. There needs to be trust within the team and this is within the President's role and this is balanced with other work. There is a new structure and the roles need to be bedded-in, also made more difficult because of the Covid situation.

Q. Do the Executive Officers and President have enough staff support?

A. There is room for improvement, but not this year - hence why a re-structure is being considered.

Q. Where did you get your management training? - your management skills are very impressive!

A. Thank you - Support from CEO, University staff coupled with experience from last year.

Part Time Officer's Reports

The Part Time Officer's Reports had been circulated to the Panel in advance and were taken as read. No Part Time Officers had been asked to attend.

The Panel had no particular questions concerning the work described in the Part Time Officer's Reports.

The Chair asked whether the Panel were happy to approve the reports which had been submitted.

The Panel were happy to do so and there was then some discussion about the varied length of the reports submitted. It was explained that Part Time Officers were asked to submit a minimum of one paragraph or three bullet points, but they were free to submit more. Workloads tended to vary by role and time of year, some were concentrated on term-time and some were spread more evenly across the year.

It was noted that the information provided to the Panel did not include Officer's attendance at Boards. It was explained that this would be included in the future, but had not been for this meeting as not all Boards had yet met and therefore it was not possible to make a valid comparison at this stage.

Recommendations to Council

The Panel made the following recommendations for consideration by Student Council:

Motions of Commendation (*These are given for exceptional work*)

- Societies Officer (BL) for very good work in difficult circumstances.
- BAME Officer (BL)
- Commercial Services Officer
- School of Business and Management Representative

Motions of Censure (*These are given when the Officer has failed to submit reports, or has failed to attend Student Council without submitting an apology, or is otherwise judged to*

have under-performed in their role). These recommendations are subject to a welfare check being carried out to ensure that there are no mitigating circumstances of which the Panel were unaware.

- School of Economics and Finance Representative
- Societies Officer (ME)
- School of Geography Representative

Motions of No Confidence *(These are given when the Officer has failed to submit reports failed to attend Student Council without apology and has generally disengaged with their role leaving the students whom they were elected to represent without effective representation). These recommendations are subject to a welfare check being carried out to ensure that there are no mitigating circumstances of which the Panel were unaware.*

Satisfaction

All other Officers not named above were considered to be performing their roles to the satisfaction of the Panel.

Appendix (for information)

Executive Officer's and Part Time Officer's Reports