

DPFS Council Report

Proposer:

Alex Savell – Deputy President
(Finance & Services)

Seconders(s):

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Contributors:

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1. Leave:

1.1. Since the last meeting I have taken one and a half days of leave

2. Policy Review:

2.1. As one of the things I wanted to achieve this year I looked to change or update a number of Policies. I have now started this process. Last Trustee board meeting we ratified the Web Policy and at this upcoming meeting I will be bringing an updated Felix Policy, a slight change to the Web Policy based on some user feedback, the recently passed Web Conduct Policy (approved by CSPB but submitted for information). And have started work on updating the Staff-Student Protocol and a new CSP Budgeting Policy for which I have also run a budgeting exit survey. It is also worth noting that earlier in the year I worked with the DPCS to draft the New Activities Committee Policy and the Activities Development Board Policy.

3. Summer Ball:

3.1. By the time of this meeting the Ball will be almost upon us. Sales have gone better than last year and we have taken a decision that I have been pushing for for some time. This will be announced soon and should hopefully help promote sales further as well as increasing student engagement in the ball. It should also help us to grow the summer ball and as we have put quite a lot of pressure on the budget for this event in 2016 this is a very good learning opportunity to ensure that we can be successful at this in future.

4. Draught Tender:

4.1. At time of writing this process is just concluding. Myself and the now Social Enterprise Manager have met with a number of breweries. The process has been more complicated than previously, with no clear front-runner at any stage. To some extent this has been very positive as it has meant a lot of competition and a great deal for the Union however it has also made it very difficult to choose. However, I am confident that Matt has reached a well-reasoned recommendation and would recommend the same option.

5. Union Budgeting:

5.1. A large amount of time has gone into this and it has led to a version being submitted to both F&R and Trustee Board. It is my feeling that this has been one of the toughest years of late for budgeting and in order to achieve some of the ambitious targets within our services that we have laid out some really tough decisions have had to be made. We have leant heavily on the revenue generating budgets this year and asked them to achieve big increases in key areas and steady growth in all and have still had to achieve some efficiencies and reduced expectations in some areas. I will not say that it has been a fun experience for me but it has been an interesting one and I think that the amount of pressure we have put on the organisation is positive.

6. Review of the year:

6.1. Please see Appendix A below for a frank review of my year to date and reflections which is as I have submitted to Trustee Board

Appendices

A. Review of the year

A.1. Introduction

First off, I would like to say how rewarding this year has been for me personally and my personal development. I have grown to understand how organisations work a lot better and have worked with some incredible people. There have of course been tensions and difficulties to work through this year and not all of these have been pleasant. The finance restructure was not a fun experience for me and the nature of my role meant there were times I felt held to account for the failing service provision in that area where I had little or no control. This has fuelled my opinion that we need to be more transparent as an organisation about what the role of Sabbas is and what the role of staff is within the Union.

I have also felt it very difficult to achieve some of my broader goals. It is still proving very difficult to get movement on replacing the sound system in Metric in order to make that into a real live venue for instance and I have not had the time or resource to really make a difference to the Metric website which was a part of my original presentation to board last August. As well as this, I have been unable to look at changes to our catering service due to the changes in that department still not being complete. I think we need to invest time in both supporting Officer Trustees in making changes and in being more transparent (and perhaps more pragmatic) about structural changes in the organisation, how long they will take and what level of service we will be able to provide in the interim. I'm very keen to see how implementation of the Head of Student Voice's plan to develop Officer Trustee Support helps with the former of these as I think it is a very good piece of work – though it potentially ought to extend further to include all Sabbatical roles.

Despite these creative tensions I have definitely enjoyed my experience overall and will value it in future. I hope those that I have worked with this year know how much of my respect they have, even when I have opposed their opinion and equally understand that that forthrightness comes from caring about this organisation and its future. There are a number of things that I have been extremely proud of this year. Some of which have been mentioned in my on-going work above but a couple of others I would like to highlight below.

A.2. Higher Education Funding

I did not expect to be working on Higher Education Funding this year, it came up and seemed an organic growth of the DPFS role to be considered as part of my remit as well as as part of my more general responsibilities as a Deputy President. I hope that Funding more broadly will remain the purview of the DPFS since the role usually attracts someone fiscally minded with an interest in the sort of details inherent in such a debate. Working on the plan to implement a new policy in time for the General Election Campaign was a challenging endeavour and took a lot of personal effort from me and those that took an active role in it. I am very proud of the several hundred responses we got to the survey that was produced and approved by council and the analysis and work that went into the recommendations and analysis document used to form the foundations for the policy which, after an inordinate General Meeting where there was nevertheless some very well informed and productive discussion, was ratified with only minor adjustments at Union Council in December.

Since then we have been working on a strategy to engage election candidates, leading to our rebranding of the campaign as 'Fund Education Fairly'. Eventually we engaged with all the candidates standing in five key constituencies, where we know the majority of our students are situated, and published the responses to three key demands for those that responded to us. There are still improvements to be made in being recognised as an important local organisation to engage with and in how we campaign and support campaigning, but I am proud of what we did accomplish and the published material on the Union website. We will be continuing to campaign on the stance established in the Higher Education Funding Policy including the amount of work that went into our response to the government consultation on Masters and PhD loans.

A.3. Club, Society and Project Budgeting

There is a lot of work still to be done to improve CSP budgeting. Some of which I have noted that we are starting this term but will doubtless be on-going. However, myself and the DPCS put a huge amount of time and effort into this process at a time where there was no Student Activities Manager or Head of Student Experience (formally Membership Services) for support and achieved a number of really good steps. We introduced more budgeting training opportunities for CSP chairs and treasurers with some of these taking place on other campuses, an updated budgeting training guide and managed to help make recommendations

on budgeting decisions which reduced the time CSPB had to commit to Budgeting by approximately a factor of two.

A.4. Operational Excellence and College Strategy

Looking back, probably too much time was spent on Operational Excellence however I am proud that the Student Finance stream upon which I sat gave such productive recommendations to the SIMP board. Many of which look like they will be being implemented in the short to medium term. Also, as a result of this I have had a number of meetings with Senior College Staff putting transparency for international payments and hidden charges on the agenda, there is more work following this up to be done in the coming year however it led to one thing that I am particularly proud of; which was having input into the Financial Sustainability Strategy Group's document on the future of Higher Education. While un-credited this was a great opportunity and was indicative of the respect college has for the Student Union and a really interesting opportunity to work with senior college staff on a document made in conjunction with other Higher Education Institutions.

I'm also really proud to have sat on the Financial Sustainability stream of the College's strategy where I was able to plant the link between student satisfaction and alumni donation as a key area if the college intends to increase this aspect of their fundraising. As well as this I was involved in the Union's response to the College's Strategy draft and was really impressed with the amount of effort that went into turning that around extremely quickly and to such a standard.

A.5. VAT Exemptions

In many ways this was a much smaller piece of work and will probably remain largely invisible in the near future. However, I think it has already started making a difference to clubs and societies since, as an approach, it means we can make more events VAT exempt and potentially help CSP fundraising across a spectrum of clubs and activities. The next steps in this process are to think about how best to monitor and administrate the new approach.