

Minutes



Title: YUSU AGM (Student Members' Meeting)

Date: 17 June 2019

Venue: Held digitally by Zoom

Present: The meeting was open to all students

1. Opening Comments

The Chair, Kelly Balmer (KB), the Policy Coordinator, opened the meeting and welcomed students, officers, staff and trustees to YUSU's first digital AGM.

KB confirmed that the meeting was quorate and ran through the format and key agenda for the meeting noting sabbatical officers would be in conversation with special guests during the meeting:

- Charlie Jeffery, the Vice-Chancellor here at the University of York,
- Dean Spears, the Director of Campus Services,
- John Robinson, Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning & Students
- Harkirit Boparai, Venue Manager at Crescent Community Venue
- Keith Morris, Head of Sport, University of York.

2. Approval of Previous Minutes

The Chair invited members to review the minutes of the previous AGM from 8 May 2019. No questions were received. Following a poll, the minutes were ratified.

3. President's Interview with the Vice Chancellor

The Chair introduced a pre-recorded interview of Samara Jones (SJ), YUSU President in conversation with Charlie Jeffery, the University's Vice Chancellor. The discussion explored the year to date, what the future might hold in the light of Covid-19, and other major challenges that Higher Education is facing.

4. Current Affiliations

The Chair introduced the President and Sports President to present on the Union's affiliations:

4.1 NUS – The National Union of Students - £31,520

SJ highlighted that the NUS affiliation fee for the next academic year is considerably lower following the NUS's work on turnaround which students had heard about in more detail from the acting NUS CEO at last year's AGM.

To recap, this work has addressed a £3m shortfall in funding for the NUS and introduced governance changes that saw the organisation split into two distinct entities, a company whose purpose is to deliver a national student voice, and a charity whose purpose is to support students' union development. Both entities are owned (as well as funded) by students' unions. SJ stated that the Unions' affiliation fee has been significantly reduced as part of this change programme - now capped at 2.5% of grants, YUSU is set to benefit from a huge £17k saving this next academic year. At the same time the organisation would retain significant benefits for our venues and commercial activity as part of the trading consortium with NUS negotiated wholesale contracts.

SJ added that the governance of these new entities is significantly simpler with the board comprising up to seven student officers, four student union members and four independent lay members alongside guaranteed seats for up to ten full-time officers. This new structure replaced 66 separate decision-making bodies and over 200 elected student leaders. These changes go a long way to address the concerns York students have expressed about the NUS; this was reflected in last year's campus wide referendum where students voted to remain affiliated to the NUS.

4.2 BUCS – British Universities & Colleges Sports - £13,355 (last academic year)

Maddie Cannell (MC) said that as we come out of lockdown we are working to establish clarity on what first term and team sports will look like for Universities. BUCS has confirmed an initial plan for returning to play and provisional information on league entries but we do not have the confirmed affiliation fee and final details on exactly what we will be affiliating to; this information is expected shortly.

MC emphasised that she is clear that students will want to play sport again and compete as soon as it is safe and feasible for them to do so and with that in mind, proposed members agree the affiliation in principle subject to any confirmation of this decision to be made following consultation and agreement with the York Sport Union Committee once the impact of changes to sports on affiliations is clear; and on the condition that any fee does not cost the Union any more than it has in the current financial year.

No questions were received on affiliations.

Following polls, both affiliations were approved.

5. Community and Wellbeing Interview

The Chair introduced a pre-recorded interview with Steph Hayle (SH), Community and Wellbeing Officer in a conversation with Dean Spears (Director of Campus Services) exploring the University's work on accommodation, laundry, buses and more.

6. Report from Trustees on the Union's Activity

The Chair of the Trustees and Union President, SJ presented on key activity over the previous year. [The presentation is available here.](#)

7. Academic Officer Interview

The Chair introduced a pre-recorded interview with Giang Nguyen (GN), Academic Officer, and Pro Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning & Students, John Robinson. The discussion reflected on some of the changes that have been made to teaching, learning and assessment over the past term and looked ahead at what next year might hold.

8. Activities Officer Interview

The Chair introduced the penultimate sabb session with Ollie Martin (OM), Activities Officer in conversation with Harkirit Boparai, Venue Manager at Crescent Community Venue. The interview focussed on community spaces and the future for York's venues.

9. The Union's Financial Accounts

The Chair of the Finance Committee, MC presented the YUSU annual accounts (2018-19) to the group covering overall financial activities, incoming and outgoing expenditure and future considerations in the light of ongoing government restrictions and the impact of Covid-19 on both the University and the Union's financial position.

The full accounts are available to view [online](#).

The presentation is available [here](#).

10. York Sport President

For the final sabb session, Maddi Cannell, York Sport President, and Keith Morris, Head of York Sport, presented an update on sport at York exploring: key developments over the past year; their collaboration on the Sport strategy; and the future of sport at York.

11. Officer Reporting

Officers reported on key activities during the course of their terms and took questions from the floor.

11.1 Samara Jones, Union President

Samara's highlights included the opportunity to work closely with and build a relationship with the new VC. She added she had been pushing for the University to be more open and transparent with students about new developments from the get-go, noting that throughout the pandemic the University had shown how agile and open it could be so she was encouraging it to continue with this approach. Recently she had launched the Covid forum, an online student feedback platform, initially developed for use after the pandemic. Finally, she said that the year had seen her, in conjunction with Ollie and Maddi, get more storage space for students combined with a commitment from the VC to deliver a student facility as a top priority for the future.

11.2 Steph Hayle, Community and Wellbeing

Steph Hayle presented on her key achievements for the year to date including: her work with OPPA to raise over £100,000 to provide scholarships for disadvantaged students through the Opportunity Award; cutting the rent by £100,000 a year, and work with the University's estates and leadership team to help save students over £6 million in rent when Covid-19 hit. In addition, SH secured over £16,000 back from Circuit Laundry and conducted research into them which led them to replace all machines on campus with brand new machines at no cost to the University or Students; she secured over half a million pounds a year to fund brand new mental health provision with one of, if not the, largest investments into student mental health at York in recent years. She added she had secured funding to hire a full time BAME Open Door practitioner, the role was currently being recruited.

11.3 Giang Nguyen, Academic Officer

Giang highlighted three core achievements: first, decolonising and diversifying the curriculum at York, which successfully led to the creation of the Union's working group on the topic, bringing the cause to become one of the Union and University's top priorities and

organising two events to raise awareness and gather students' feedback, one in October and one in June. Secondly, on transparency of assessment Giang's work led to the launch of the 'not-so-big assessment survey' to gather students' feedback on the transparency of assessment information, and also successfully lobby the University to review their guide to assessment. This is due to start in 2021. Finally, she highlighted effective representation as a success, citing lobbying the University to pass a paper to lobby for a truly students-as-partners policy to Senate, truly empowering all our reps to embed a students-as-partners approach in their work.

11.4 Maddie Cannell, Sport President

Maddie stated her achievements included: setting up a referee and coaching network to help student refs and coaches earn money at Uni; working closely with liberation networks on several campaigns throughout the year including on an accessibility guide for sports clubs and the Red Flag Campaign. She also ran the first ever Virtual Roses and won it, with clubs raising a fantastic £4,883 for charity in the process! Finally, MC noted she had helped to secure £5,000 for new mats in Derwent Squash Courts and got the backing of several NGBs and the University for a 3G pitch development in the future. She added that the Estates department is now considering proposals for water sports to take place on the Campus East Lake based on a paper she submitted to planners, alongside the work from the water sports clubs.

11.5 Ollie Martin, Activities Officer

Ollie's highlights included events and culture, a big focus for him in a year that saw him work on improving YUSU's relations with city partners and empowering students to fight to protect city venues. He added he had given the lounge as a student-run events space and seen more student-run nights than ever, as well as lobbying to improve facilities in the University's space. On facilities, he said the team had finally managed to secure society storage with the Estates teaming handing over the Unity Health building. He added this had been a result of collaborative staff and sabb efforts over the years so represents a massive victory. The commitment from the Vice Chancellor on a new building was also an amazing highlight. Finally, in terms of reward and recognition Ollie stated the team had successfully lobbied the Careers department to overhaul the York Award, making it more broadly applicable to students and ensuring students don't miss out. He added they had also rolled out a digital events season which had been a mammoth task for staff.

12. Trustee Question Time

Officers responded to the following questions:

Why did YUSU wait until June to condemn anonymous "confession" pages such as Yorfess, when student media have pointed to behaviour ranging from attacking our Chinese student community, to supporting white nationalist conspiracy theories from as far back as February?

SJ explained that as the Statement published yesterday demonstrated Officers had lobbied extensively behind the scenes over a long period to address the concerns students had raised about such sites. The joint statement from the Unions and the VC (published on 4 February) and the all student emails sent later that month from Officers were just two examples of officers' efforts to remind students of their responsibilities to other members of the community and the requests to students to evaluate their online presence, be kind and think twice before submitting and posting hateful comments. SJ acknowledged perhaps Officers could have spoken out publicly sooner but felt that the Sabb team had been consistent in challenging these issues.

SH reiterated that the previous two Sabb teams had raised concerns with the University over a substantial period of time. She added the officers had to achieve a difficult balance in that it wouldn't be appropriate for them to discuss reports of harassment or bullying that they had made publicly, but that didn't mean that they weren't taking action.

What provisions is YUSU putting in place for societies, sports clubs, and media groups if a physical Freshers' Fair is impossible at the start of the new academic year?

MC responded that the activities team is working on a return to play phasing model for over 300 groups to adjust activity to enable every club or society to carry out their usual activity in an adapted way to meet any health and safety or social distancing requirements. She gave the example that phase 1 may see solo training or smaller group activity underway, phase 2 could include no contact training, phase 3 would be a full return. MC emphasised this work needed to take a comprehensive look at activity given the volume of it and number of students involved but she recognised it was important that students understood this work was happening. A consultation would be underway with students shortly.

OM added that no concrete decisions had been made as yet - YUSU runs the largest freshers' fair in the UK which routinely brings almost 10k students to campus. This model would not be feasible with social distancing measures. He added that while the Fair would need to be delivered in a different way, YUSU would be reliant on the University to set out how it wanted activity to run, subject to government guidance and further work to identify health and safety requirements. He stated YUSU would do everything it needed to ensure the Fair could take place in a safe way adding that the situation speaks to the need for Refreshers to be more important than ever

Given the understandable poor performance of YUSU CS, where will YUSU look to direct cuts to spending?

Samara responded that YUSU was doing its best to make savings wherever reasonably practicable. Ben Vulliamy (BV) (YUSU CEO) added that the Board was meeting that week, one of its priorities would be to review budgets for the year ahead. He shared that YUSU had asked the University to support the Union through this difficult phase, for example, requesting modest additional funding to try and protect spending on advice services and to support student activity to run flexibly. He added the Union was trying to generate revenue as best as it could; the environment meant accurate financial forecasting was hard but the Union would be working with independent local businesses in different ways for example supporting them to get back on track while meeting students' needs. He confirmed finances would remain under close review.

Could we be updated on the progress of deployment of the SUMS platform, given the challenges it presented during the last election period, and when their contract is next up for review?

SJ acknowledged that the introduction of the system had brought some teething issues. These were not a quick fix but she felt confident that things were moving in the right direction and over the long run students would start to see improvements.

Point 50 of the Articles of Association dictates that all meetings of the Union and of the Trustees should have minutes publicly available on the Union website. YUSU has recently added the past three years of Trustee Board minutes, but no other committee has its minutes available. Why is YUSU not fulfilling this requirement?

SJ acknowledged that there had been issues uploading Board minutes to the website relating to transfer across the system platforms but she understood that this was resolved.

BV added that the Articles state YUSU would have all minutes of all meetings available. He acknowledged that YUSU did not have every minute available for every club and society but felt that it would be a full-time secretarial job to provide minutes of all such student meetings. If the Board felt that was a priority then YUSU could look at how that would be funded. He added that YUSU did publish its Trustee Minutes which was something that not all charities did. In addition, the auditors also annually review how YUSU's articles of governance are enacted and this was not something that they or the Charity Commission had ever raised a concern about. BV suggested it may be helpful to consider accountability and transparency more broadly, and perhaps in different ways than printed minutes alone would enable.

How will YUSU will support the Volunteering Projects with volunteer recruitment and training in the coming year? Training volunteers and getting them involved with project activity is important for the long-term future of the projects, but we may have fewer opportunities to do this due to social distancing. This is particularly relevant for projects working with schools and other outside groups who will be following their own social distancing procedures.

OM responded that staff were currently undertaking the task of reviewing how student activity could be risk assessed across 70+ sports clubs, 230 societies and 18 volunteering projects. As part of that YUSU would be looking at every aspect of activity and how groups could interact going forward. He acknowledged that schools may be a particularly difficult area, while there was clearly a drive to get schools back, any activity would need to be subject to Government guidance and include plans for different scenarios.

MC added that in relation to the training element for society committee and sports club committees, as well as volunteer projects, the team were looking at moving modules online where possible. Training takes place face to face normally and with reduced staff capacity (due to furlough) this is taking longer than it would normally. Going forward MC said she was optimistic that some training may be able to take place in person but if not, then online equivalents would be available to ensure that all necessary training would take place.