

# ***People & Planet Student Activities Limited***

## **Meeting of the Board of Trustees – 14 March 2015**

### **Minutes**

Present: Emma Simpson (chair), Rob Abrams, Charlotte Butler, Philippa Faulkner, Ian Leggett, Lucy Pearce, Adam Ramsay, Joe Saxton, Rob Saunders, Phoebe Taylor, Lewis White

Newly-elected student trustees in attendance: Sophie Baumert, Chris Saltmarsh

Staff in attendance: John Clements, Andy Taylor

#### **1. New student members**

Paper 1 listed the newly elected student members who would take office at the meeting in July. Sophie and Chris, the only new trustees able to attend at short notice, were welcomed.

#### **2. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2014**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2014 were approved and signed.

#### **3. Resolution to change bank signatories**

Trustees unanimously approved the resolution to remove John from the list of authorised signatories following his retirement, and to add David Calver and Juliette Daigre in the attached wording required by the bank.

[The directors of People & Planet Limited, who were present at this meeting, approved a resolution in the same terms for that company]

#### **Action point:**

John to start signatory change process

#### **4. Update from Quarterly Review**

Andy introduced Paper 4, which was taken first as some trustees had not yet arrived. In response to questions, he explained that the Electronics Watch project was concentrating on organisational issues which meant that less effort had gone into supporting groups on this issue, whilst the Garments strand had lost its manager.

The Fossil Free divestment campaign was going well, but was short of resources to exploit its success. We were increasingly working with other groups on this issue to raise larger amounts of funding abroad.

The high level of dependency on grant income was noted. This had always been a problem; various

sources of unrestricted funding had been explored but none had proved enduring except the FAN Club, whose growth remained very slow.

Trustees suggested that the indicator for strategic aim 3.2 (level of reserves) should be red, not amber, as we were still a long way short of our objective to have adequate reserves.

Trustees also asked why the indicator for aim 4.1 (a clear, stable and flexible organisational structure) was amber. It was explained that the structure was bedding down well but there was still discussion around capacity issues, joint working in CampAct and integrating the Economic Justice Project into our mainstream work.

It was confirmed that existing trustees who had not had any induction training could attend the trustee induction day arranged for 12 July in Oxford (tbc).

**Action Point:**

Office to confirm details of trustee induction day

**4. Review of the University League**

Andy introduced Paper 2 which had been prepared by Hannah Smith, the League manager, following staff meetings and telephone interviews by Joe. A decision was needed as to whether we continued with the League, dropped it or continued in a modified form.

Joe described the history of the League and its major impact on the HE sector in driving forward the sustainability agenda. 2014 had been problematic due to the boycott and the level of resource needed at a time when a new member of staff had been appointed, there had been a large-scale revision of the criteria and we had not achieved our income targets to make it self-funding. He was concerned about capacity, a continued boycott, the cessation of funding in May, how we could ensure its future effectiveness in the sector and its relationship to our strategy.

Andy explained that staff felt strongly that the League contributed to campaign successes and gave examples where gains had been made at institutions based on improving their League score. The League has also given greater access to senior management for student groups.

The paper described how the effort could be reduced by stripping out unnecessary criteria, using more EMR data, not consulting on criteria, and greatly reducing the FOI element. Funding prospects had been agreed and it was also suggested that the manager's hours could be reduced to give a longer period to raise funds.

Trustees raised a number of questions, including whether the League was the best use of scarce resources, especially staff time; was there a risk of removing too many criteria and making it meaningless; did the many improvements in performance in the sector since the start of the League mean that the scope for further improvement was now very reduced; was it not better to focus on campaigns and creating active groups; the need to be clear about the strategic objectives satisfied by a changed League.

Students present commented on use of the League by groups. It was apparent that some used it and some did not. Charlotte asked whether it could be extended to FE at some stage if it was continued, and expressed appreciation for the help she had received from HE student groups. It was also suggested that the League could be bi-annual, but the problems of continuity and impact in this scenario were recognised. Overall, it was felt that the impact of the League on campaigns

and effectiveness varied too greatly between institutions to be the sole reason for continuing.

At this stage, trustees decided to look at the budget and return to the League in the light of the financial situation.

## **5. Finance report and proposed budget**

John presented paper 3. The financial position for 2014/15, which ended in two weeks time, was now clearly a surplus which might be around £20-25,000. Trustees congratulated staff on achieving this satisfactory result when we had started the year in a state of financial crisis. The sacrifices made by individuals who had reduced their hours was appreciated. This outcome should result in the company having about £10-15,000 in reserves at the start of the new year.

Turning to the proposed budget for 2015/16, John explained that the paper contained two forecasts, one based on including the League as proposed in Paper 2, and one based on ending the project when the funding expired in May/June. As the proposal for the League included a substantial amount of prospective income, there was little difference between the outcome of each forecast which showed a surplus of around £5,000. John explained the assumptions in the forecasts and these were agreed by trustees. As the forecast did not produce a surplus in line with the strategic plan (which would have been c£20-25,000), the paper proposed that a final decision on the budget would have to be deferred until there was more clarity around funding.

Trustees raised a number of issues, including those relating to the League and its inclusion in the proposed budget and deferred from the previous item. Staff were asked for clarity on whether applying for funding for the League would have a negative impact on our ability to raise funds for other projects, if we applied to the same funders. Andy responded that there was no competition between the League and other projects. The lack of any budgeted activity in Scotland was queried; staff would be continuing to support groups and actions in Scotland but we currently had no external funding for this. The number of projects continuing with the low level of staff resources was questioned as a risk; should we not be reducing the spread of activity and focussing on a couple of well-funded campaigns? There were also concerns about the timetable of applications and whether we would be able to raise the necessary funds in good time, given the past record of delays in getting results.

Trustees also returned to the question of whether the League could be bi-annual, whilst recognising that this did not address the basic question of its strategic fit. Andy suggested that the League manger could be part of the Fossil Free team for part of her time, especially if the League were to be bi-annual. He also pointed out that, without the League, it was felt that actions would have to be escalated faster with a risk to both our targets for funders, and for students who might face disciplinary action.

Rob S, as Treasurer, commented that the surplus did need to be greater to give more confidence in the light of our low level of reserves. He questioned the level of prospective income, given how often funders delayed decisions and the likelihood that some grants would need to be split between 2015/06 and later years.

The inclusion of a bid for funds for Garments Watch was questioned, and the position of Electronics

Watch which had no funding beyond 31 December 2015. Both of these projects would be dependent on gaining further funding, but would in any case be replaced by a new campaign in 2016.

In relation to the League, trustees were supportive on continuation at a lower level as proposed in Paper 2 but wished to minimise the risk, so **agreed** that the remaining funding for the League could be used to employ the manager on the same or a reduced number of days (staff to decide the most appropriate level). If the League could not be shown to be fully funded by the end of that period (that is, covered the FCR cost of £37,000 shown in the forecast), it would be discontinued and no further bids for funds could be made, except where it was part of a bid for another project. Even in that case, any activity attributable to the League had to be fully funded. The position would be reviewed during the development of the new strategic plan.

Returning to the budget, staff were of the opinion that no further cost reductions could be made without severe damage to the organisation and its objectives. There was discussion around the proposed second intern but it was agreed to leave this in.

Trustees **agreed** the proposal in Paper 3, that an extra meeting be arranged in late May/early June at which the funding position would be reviewed and a definite decision taken on a budget for the new year.

**Action point:**

John to set up Doodle to fix date for extra meeting

**6. Succession planning – Chair of trustees**

Joe reported that there has been no applicants for the chair of trustees, and questioned whether we really needed anything other than a formal chair as the organisation was now operating a flat structure and having a chair did not seem to fit in with that. It was more important to have someone who was available to meet staff regularly than just to chair meetings. Joe would definitely resign at the same time as the retiring student trustees (nominally 1 July) and the remaining trustees would have to take a decision.

It was **agreed** that this would be discussed at the next meeting or by email.

**7. Trustee involvement between meetings**

Philippa introduced Paper 5 and commented that the Scottish Working Group needed to be refocussed.

It was **agreed** to defer consideration of this item to the next meeting.

It was also **agreed** that trustees would contact their staff 'buddies'.

**Action point:**

All trustees to contact their nominated staff buddy

## **8. Risk register**

Paper 6, the risk register drawn up by the staff management team, was presented for information and would be brought to future meetings for review.

## **9. Dates & venue of next meetings**

Further meetings in 2015 would be:

Additional meeting in late May/early June - tbc

11 July in Oxford

17 October in London

12 December in Oxford

JRC

26 March 2015

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### **List of action points:**

#### **Change of bank signatories.**

John to start signatory change process

#### **Update from Quarterly Review**

Office to confirm details of trustee induction day

#### **Finance report and proposed budget**

John to set up Doodle to fix date for extra meeting

#### **Trustee involvement between meetings**

All trustees to contact their nominated staff buddy