

COU14D032

Title: *Student Representation on UEA Committees, Executives and Groups*
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Confidentiality

It is not proposed that this paper or the resulting minute should be considered confidential.

Issue

The Students' Union recently submitted papers to the Executive Team (ET) proposing a more comprehensive student representation on the full range of University Committees, Executives and ad hoc working groups. ET accepted that there are a number of instances where student representation was evidently appropriate and would add value (for example Honorary Degrees and Awards Committee, where the principal impact of the decision is to enhance the experience of students and their families at Congregation) and these have been implemented.

ET did not support the proposals for student representation on two Council Committees; Senior Officers Remuneration Committee (SORC) which determines issues of pay and conditions for the Executive Team, and Finance Group. The Students' Union has asked that that decision be reviewed, and the Chairman and Vice-Chancellor felt that it would be appropriate to put the matter before Council.

Recommendation

Council is invited to consider the proposals from the Students' Union and the reservations of ET and to determine whether the membership of SORC and Finance Group should be amended.

Resource Implications

N/A

Risk Implications

If indeed these are risks:

- on the one hand declining the proposal can give a perception of a lack of transparency and an unwillingness to fully engage the student body in the governance of the University, and a missed opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of these committees; on the other hand
- adopting the proposal may change the dynamics and effectiveness of these committees and question why other groups on Council are not also represented.

Equality and Diversity

N/A

Timing of decisions

N/A

Further Information

N/A

Discussion

The Students' Union's position has been authored by Chris Jarvis and is set out below in italics:

Introduction

This note proposes placing a student member (drawn from the student members of council), onto the Finance Group and Remuneration Committee. We believe this to be an uncontroversial step as student members already participate in a number of committees, selection panels and groups where the strictest confidentiality is expected, and have ample experience in the sensitivities of such arrangements. We have anticipated the potential issues, however, and sought to address these fully in the paper.

This proposal goes hand in hand with the conviction that the student voice is of vital importance and should be heard on all levels of UEA decision making. We trust that the council will agree this is a positive step forward and support these changes.

Recommendation

We propose that one of the current student members of Council is made a full participant of the Remuneration Committee for a period of three years, after which their membership is reviewed.

We propose that one of the current student members of Council is made a full participant of the Finance Group for a period of three years, after which their membership is reviewed.

Further Information

Chris Jarvis, Student Union Representative, Christopher.jarvis@uea.ac.uk

Background

UEA is a successful institution with an impressive academic record. Senior Officers (the Vice-Chancellor, the Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Registrar and Secretary) are crucial to this and should be remunerated accordingly.

In a landscape of £9k fees and with fee income overall generating a large proportion of UEA income, taking student participation seriously is more important than ever.

UEA has an admirable commitment to ensuring student presence on all of the major decision making forums of the University, including Council, Senate, and Boards of School.

As well as their presence being symbolically important, students bring useful insights and contribute to sound outcomes.

Many of the committees, groups and panels that students sit on require the strictest confidentiality as they often deal with very sensitive information. Students' professionalism in this regard has never been questioned and we strongly adhere to the Nolan Seven Principles of Public Life, particularly those relating to objectivity and integrity.

Sabbatical officers have sat on interview and selection panels for the Vice Chancellor as well as for other staff.

One of the sabbatical officers directly line manages the Chief Executive of the Students' Union, as well as conducting their appraisal in addition to sitting on the Finance Committee of the Students' Union. They have experience in making HR and Finance decisions and understand the seriousness and importance of maintaining professionalism here.

Two of the Union officers are full and voting members of Council but have never sat on Finance Group or Remuneration Committee.

Benefits

Putting a student representative on these bodies would demonstrate that the University recognises students as crucial stakeholders who should be involved in all decision making and would be roundly welcomed by the student body.

As representatives of key stakeholders, the student officers can bring valuable insight onto the bodies, and contribute to a robust and effective committee whilst simultaneously allaying any conspiratorial or unhelpful gossip around financial affairs or remuneration of senior staff.

ET's reservations are as follows:

SORC: Members of ET would not have expected student representatives to be involved in the consideration of salaries and terms and conditions on a routine basis. Discussions on these matters are highly personalised and it is a reasonable expectation that the group considering these issues will be tightly drawn and it is helpful that members are not personally stakeholders in the University and will assess ET's performance solely against approved Council strategies, rather than any other agenda.

The general precedent in the University is that students are not involved in issues of salary, grading or promotion, and insofar as Council has reserved matters for which student colleagues withdraw they are primarily about names or identifiable members of staff.

Finance Group: The origins of the Finance Group arose from a previous review of Council effectiveness which resulted in a reduction in the size of Council from just over 30 members to its current 17. Previously there had been a Planning and Resources Committee (PRC) (a traditional Finance and General Purposes Committee (F&GP)) which was a subset of the various constituents of Council, with the exception of student representatives. PRC considered any issues which had resource implications and as a consequence issues were seen as well "baked" before coming to full Council. Members of Council who were not members of PRC were reluctant to re-open discussions which it had already taken place and they felt distanced from key decisions. With a smaller Council it was far more practical for there to be effective debate in that forum and PRC was abandoned.

There was a concern in Council, however, that the Treasurer would lose an opportunity to get "under the skin" of the budget and day to day financial performance, and that some issues where there might be a conflict for the student body (fees and rents) could helpfully be dealt with in a body separate from Council. With this in mind the Finance Group was set up comprising the Vice-Chancellor, Treasurer, Deputy Chair, Registrar & Secretary and Finance Director. Latterly a third independent member of Council has been added, in part with an eye to the inevitable turnover of members as they near the end of the normal six-year (exceptionally nine-year) full term of office.

The size of the Finance Group means that meetings are conversational in with no sense of asking too many detailed questions. That it very much how the group was planned to operate, mainly as a forum for the Treasurer to monitor, probe and challenge financial issues. If it is accepted that that is the purpose of the Finance Group, then it is not evident that additional members of Council should be added. Council might have to consider whether other constituencies should also be represented (that could also be true for SORC) and the nature and dynamics of the committee will drift towards an F&GP. The body will become more formal and less discursive and members of Council who are not members of Finance Group will again feel removed from some of the key decisions. If there are some matters which are being dealt with at Finance Group that Council would prefer to debate itself, that would simply be a matter of changing the terms of reference.

Attachments

There are no attachments.