



KPA Ordinary General Meeting

Monday 4th December 2017

Chancellors Building: CBA0.075A– 5:15pm

Committee in attendance:

President – Ieuan Smith (IS)

Vice President – George Blake (GB)

Association Secretary – John Wootton (JW)

Activities Officer – Christopher Murphy (CM)

Equality and Diversity Officer – Sophia Taha (ST)

International Officer – Kristine Vu (KV)

Student Trustee – Liam Searle (LS) (*Chair*)

12 voting members; 2 non-members

1. Apologies

None

2. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Chair asked if there are any questions with the minutes of the last meeting. KB asked if the KPA was under budget.

IS responded with: the full budget will be released in May 2018, this is the best time to discuss this matter.

3. KPA Committee Updates and Elections

3.1 IS: Reported he would discuss the Clubhouse relocation in section 5 of the agenda.

3.2 JW: Reported that the by-elections were successful in late October to early November, and would be discussed in his officer report later in the agenda.

4. Officer Reports

4.1 Association Secretary Report: JW thanked the membership for attending the meeting. JW explained that the Secretary's responsibilities had been split into communication with the membership, organising both general meetings and elections, and work regarding environment and sustainability.

Communication with the membership.

JW highlighted the number of activities that he had been involved with to meet his constitutional responsibility for communicating with the membership. This included regular attendance with open days and welcome events, regular attendance to 'KPA goes to...' events, the weekly digest (a weekly email to the KPA mailing list that highlights events, news and activities for postgraduates to get involved with) and finally a focus to developing the social media presence of the KPA. JW pointed towards the growth of the Instagram account from 230 followers to 765 in a matter of months.

Successful organisation of the By-Election

JW explained that he had been busy organising the October by-election which had been very successful. Because of the by-election the KPA now had a new equality and diversity officer (ST), International Officer (KV) and Student Trustee (LS) filling all available positions. Two of three positions were contested, showing a healthy amount of interest and involvement in the KPA as an institution.

Environment and Sustainability

JW highlighted his involvement in the staff sustainability network and in attending workshops on behalf of the KPA to trouble shoot the system that will replace green impact. It was pointed out that by engaging with this staff sustainability network, it would benefit the KPA by making it more environmentally sustainable and by opening it up to participation in environment and sustainability themed events across campus. **Since this meeting took place, the successful launch of the Staff sustainability network has taken place.*

Additional

Additional to this JW mentioned two issues that he had been involved with which are representing Postgraduates with regards to developing strategy regarding the new Doctoral loans that are set to come into operation in September 2018 and with respect to mental health provisions for postgraduate students.

4.2 Vice-President's Report: The Vice President's report is split into sections, welfare and events. This is because the Vice President role is largely an open portfolio role, meaning that the nature of the sabbatical work undertaken is not fixed.

Welfare

On welfare, GB highlighted that he had been involved with a range of different programmes including a social media campaign called 16 days against gender based violence. This involved the daily recognition of significant people who have contributed in their own way to better articulate the problems associated with gender based violence. This took place primarily on Facebook in the form of a post which explained a significant author's works and why it is important.

GB has also been supporting specific students who have been going through various appeals processes within the university.

Events

Regarding events, GB has been supporting Keele is Global, has organised a data science career event which will take place the following week and has successfully organised a weekly board games event that takes place on Wednesday afternoons in the upstairs of the clubhouse. GB encouraged those in attendance to come forward with any ideas or activities that they would like to do and offered support in getting them up and running.

MG asked if the gender related workshops taking place in January are related to the 16 days against gender based violence. GB said that they were not related.

4.3 President's Report

IS explained that whilst his role is split into three components (elected sabbatical officer, Chair of the Trustees, and CEO of the Charity) his time is largely taken up by the latter two aspects.

CEO

Regarding his role as the CEO IS explained that his focus has been on improving the governance of the charity. 'Improving the charity', IS explained, involved ensuring that the charity is compliant with the law in terms of data protection, employee management and governance – which is ensuring that procedures are in place and are followed appropriately.

It was mentioned that Alison Tansey, our part-time member of staff, supports some of these processes and manages the KPA bursary. IS took this opportunity to express his gratitude to Alison for her contributions and continued support in this area.

IS went on to explain his goal when performing his role as the CEO which is to make sure that the charity can achieve its goals of effectively representing postgraduate interests. Toward this end, he thought that the current man-power available was a possible issue given that the KPA has only two full-time officers, a part-time officer and a part-time member of staff.

Sabbatical Officer

Regarding his role as a sabbatical officer, IS has been focusing particularly on postgraduate research students. He mentioned that JW, as the only postgraduate research student on the committee, was very helpful in assisting with this focus by providing insight into how things happen as a PGR student.

A key area of focus is to improve policy and processes of the university regarding postgraduate research students such as the policy around leave of absence (which is not clear) and the induction process which at the time was unsatisfactory and needed much improvement to meet the needs of new postgraduate students i.e. in terms of the information provided.

Regarding postgraduate inductions, IS said that whilst advice from the KPA had largely been ignored last year, the situation was starting to improve in terms of receptivity. To improve the induction process changes needed to be made at the prearrival, arrival and faculty levels. A further issue to address is the discrepancy between those that start in September and those that start in January.

IS raised that Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students cannot choose their modules in July (like undergraduates). It would be of great benefit if they could because it would make timetabling much easier and would give students a chance to organise themselves better at the start of term.

Following a recent interest in the status of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) IS informed the membership that Keele's contracts state that GTAs are employees which means they are protected by employment law. This is substantially better than at other universities. Despite this, there are still some issues pertaining to inconsistencies between employment and the student status of the individual, for example, taking a leave of absence is not mentioned within the contract but maternity leave is.

A further focus has been on providing strategic planning and consultation with the university regarding the doctoral loans that will be available in September 2018. The government will provide a £25,000 loan but you will not be eligible for this loan if you are in receipt of public money however, it has been determined that it would be possible for the University to provide a fee waiver.

Some work has been done to look at the scheduling of when students are expected to pay their tuition and accommodation fees due to the inconsistency of the due dates and loan payment dates. Two packages for paying fees have been suggested, the method of payment depending on if

the student in question is self-funded (monthly payments) or in receipt of a postgraduate loan (in-line with loan payments).

Regarding student voice reps, IS said that different schools have different approaches regarding their management and that this reduces the amount of accountability within the process. The lack of centralised approach to management also means that there are instances of disproportionate student reps in relation to the total number of people on the course i.e. Schools are only automatically signed up to the SU system if they have 20 students on the course. Below that schools must volunteer onto it or create your own system. This is unacceptable because it can mean there is no voice feeding back about certain courses. Equally, other schools allow more student reps than what might be necessary. To tackle this, it has been suggested that schools need to report to the SU and the KPA and inform them of how they intend to run their student rep system so that they can be better managed.

IS encouraged the membership present to get involved with activities that are available to them such as yoga, board games and the 'KPA goes to...' events. It was also said that we have the resources to support them with organising conferences or any other type of event that they think would be of benefit to other postgraduates.

It was said that the overnight study space set aside in the Darwin building is no longer available for this function as it was determined to be an unsuitable room. As such, the committee will be looking to find a replacement space by the summer vacation because the overnight study space recorded over 1,000 hours of study time (with an estimated extra 1,000 unrecorded study hours). The space needs to be appropriate to the needs of the students that uses it; it is also necessary that the security team are involved in the process to preserve the safety of the students. It would be ideal if the space had facilities or even a vending machine available. Meeting these criteria is quite difficult and will take some time.

IS explained that the nature of student courses and the student experience is not always within the control of the KPA or even the University. Therefore, it is important to develop a national voice capable of expressing the needs of postgraduates. The committee has been investing in relationships with other postgraduate officers from across the country towards this end.

Regarding mental health, IS assured the membership that in any relevant meeting or committee, the KPA officers often ask, "What about Postgraduates?" when it comes to mental health provisions. In line with this there is a catalyst bid in the pipeline which is being applied for to obtain additional funding that can be used to increase and develop the current provisions for mental health across the university.

The committee is also focussed on providing postgraduate away days in the future to help to combat isolation which is widespread and significant factor in mental health within the postgraduate community.

ST raised a concern about students choosing their modules in July because it was talking to tutors about the modules closer to the time that made a big difference regarding her choice. IS responded by saying that the committee is keen to put on a pre-arrival event which could fulfil this function to supplement the decision-making process for those that need it but given the majority of people can make their choices sooner, they ought to be.

ST Said that a lot of her course had problems with Visas and missed module selection and talking to staff. Moving module selection forward could further impede on a process that is already quite difficult.

CM said that there are similar issues for modules such as the Teaching and Learning in Higher Education module and in for language registration. IS explained that postgraduate fees do not go directly to the language centres, as a result postgraduates do not get priority in signing onto the course.

5 KPA Updates

IS informed the membership that the accommodation progress on campus has been postponed indefinitely which means that the relocation of the KPA Clubhouse will also be postponed until the project reconvenes.

IS reassures the membership that the Clubhouse will not fall into disrepair due to the postponed move. The Clubhouse will not be neglected and will receive some investment in the interim.

CM asked if the clubhouse will be shut down throughout any renovation period.

IS – yes it will be. Throughout January there will be major works on the Clubhouse for environmental health reasons, we will also take this opportunity to give it a new coat of paint.

6 Constitutional Change

The meeting was not quorate which, by constitutional rule, it must be to pass constitutional changes. As a result, the issue of constitutional change will be passed onto the next General Meeting.

7 Motions

7.1 No Third Year Modules at Masters Level

Proposer: IS Seconded by: KB

As the proposer of the motion, IS presented the motion: PGT students are not happy with the reality of having to study 3rd year modules during their master's courses.

This is taking place because there are not enough master's level specific courses and so year 3 modules are adapted for a PGT course. However, if a student took the 3rd year module in their bachelor's degree then they are ineligible to take the master's version. This has the effect of forcing master's students to take modules that are not relevant to the topic of study that they paid for to make up necessary credits. This is not good enough.

There were concerns about the ways to supplement the education of students through audit courses rather than taking them but it was eventually agreed that the priority as far as the KPA is concerned should be to lobby the University to provide more level 7 modules rather than to find ways around a bad system.

IS Amends an action point to include 'and to ensure these are replaced with level 7 modules'.

The room voted on the motion:

Votes:

For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion Passed.

7.2 Communication, Communication, Communication

Proposer: KB Seconded by: GB

The proposer presented the motion.

KB acknowledges that the Students' Union has attempted to make some progress but it was insufficient progress.

MG confirmed that he too was not receiving emails from the SU even though he used to. He also asked if the action points represent our position on this matter effectively enough.

GB said that Tom Snape, the Union Development and Democracy Officer, was working on the issue but did not know the extent of the problem at the time. Also, the person capable of investigating the technical aspect to this problem went on holiday, which further delayed progress. Since other students have brought this issue up, it is now being taken much more seriously.

The room voted on the motion:

7.2.1 For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion Passed.

7.3 Not All Masters Students Are Postgraduates

Proposer: IS Seconded by: JW

The proposer presented the motion.

A full member of the KPA is defined to be a registered postgraduate student at Keele University or a Trustee of the charity. This means that students that are a part of integrated master's courses do not qualify as members as they do not graduate prior to their Masters element thereby meaning they are officially undergraduates. It was argued that this is unfair given that these students may require similar support like other Masters students (who may be on their course) but cannot access the resources of the KPA due to not being members.

It was raised that a new definition of what counts as a postgraduate student would mean an increased membership and that this would lead to a new set of challenges. Among them would be to ensure that the KPA has a firm grasp on the unique challenges faced by integrated master's students. This includes everything from how they're funded to how they interact with the postgraduate community on a social level.

KB pointed out that the SU should do more for them. It is not solely the responsibility of the KPA. The discussion led to the fundamental question: What counts as a postgraduate? Is it student experience or their current position? Another question asked was 'what is the utility of using the graduation process as a marker?' Ultimately, the room seemed to agree that there are already different shades of what it means to be a postgraduate and that to add one more is not outside the remit of the KPA as an institution. They also agreed that, by their understanding of what it means to be a postgraduate, Integrated Masters students meet this criteria.

7.3.1 The room voted on the motion:

For: 12

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Motion Passed.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 There is no other business

8.2 The meeting is called to a close.