



Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Thursday 28th May 2020 at 17:00– 19:00
(Online meeting via MS Teams)

1. Present:

Bettina Kelemen, Katie Charlton, Currie Agyeman, Sharon Yang, Alison Tansey (KPA Co-ordinator), Amy Blaney, Gabriella Gay, Sophia Taha, Dzifa Blagodee, Jamal Aldi, Atieme Ogbolosingha

2. Apologies:

Parker Robinson

3. Election Results

AT was pleased to report that in the recent KPA election, voter engagement was positive and 216 votes were cast. There was also a record number of candidates, although no-one stood for Activities Officer so this position is still vacant and there will be a By-election in October / November 2020.

Thanks were expressed to the outgoing Committee members, who had worked extremely hard. The new KPA Committee for 2020-21 is as follows:

Katie Charlton – President
Parker Robinson– Vice President
Atieme Ogbolosingha – Association Secretary
Dzifa Blagodee– Equality and Diversity Officer
Bettina Keleman– International Officer
Sophia Taha– Student Trustee

4. Officer Reports-(Verbal):

a) Report by Katie Charlton, President

As a Committee and Clubhouse, some fantastic events were hosted prior to the country's lockdown status. In February we held an "Allsorts of Love Week" to celebrate the varying forms of love during Valentines. Our Equality and Diversity Officer worked very hard to set up an event for each day of the week for our postgraduate students. These events focused on healthy relationships, loving the self, friendships and building relationships with others. We also held a week long campaign called "FebYOUary". The campaign aimed to address the low mood that many are faced with in the winter months after Christmas. It was a week that allowed students to focus on bettering their health and wellbeing. We provided a free brunch, paid for students to attend yoga sessions at the sports centre, and organised a meal out for postgraduates, for which we contributed 50% towards the cost, at the end of the week in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

One of our Clubhouse staff also got in touch about setting up a space to appreciate men's mental health specifically. This led to the formation of "Men-tal Health Mondays", where students are encouraged to chat and talk to each other in a safe space in the Clubhouse. With no specific reference to mental health, it encourages our students to reduce isolation, check in with others and acknowledge when times might be tough and speak out.

Another event that we hosted which was really well received by our students was "International Mother Tongue Day". For this day, we encouraged students to join us for language table talks. This allowed international students in particular, to talk to one another and to share new languages. It was also a practice space for international students, wanting to improve their English language skills. It is an event we will aim to continue regularly, as it was so well attended by our postgraduate students.

EGM & Strike Action

Another issue that cropped up in February was around KPA support for students in relation to strike action. We held an Extraordinary General Meeting, which allowed our membership to vote on the policy set forth by our trustee board. As we did not reach quorum, the trustees had to make the decision to pass the policy. It was passed, meaning that we were to support students however they felt reasonable, throughout the strike action. Whilst we promoted events that were taking place on campus, we had very little response from our student body on what program of events they might like to get involved with, such as letter writing to the VC. We did however, receive numerous bookings for students and members of the UCU to book out the Clubhouse space for study sessions. Strike action came to an end on the 13th of March 2020.

KPA Election Preparation

Prior to lockdown, time was spent updating our website in preparation for elections. We decided that this year, we would like our committee members to provide a more thorough "day in the life of" their roles and responsibilities. We also provided guidance from the government website, about what it takes to be a trustee of a charity. Numerous role sections were added to the website, including the formal job description as well as a personal anecdote from each committee member about their role and responsibilities. We also spent a lot of time this year on the #SheShouldRun campaign. We encouraged the Committee to create personal videos that shared some of their fears about running for an elected position, prior to being elected. As we have a very diverse Committee this year, their lived experiences provided a reassuring take on being a sabbatical officer to any potential candidates. The website was updated with personal stories from our female committee members, which really provided a personal touch. This hopefully made our elections process less daunting to candidates.

Covid- 19 and Elections

As the University became more concerned with social distancing, KPA Officers began working from home, which meant that many of the planned election events were amended and delivered online. Instead of a committee Q&A, we provided videos on social media, asking postgraduates to send personal messages or emails to the officers to find out answers to some of their questions or concerns. We also created videos for #SheShouldRun, to encourage women and students from minority backgrounds to nominate themselves for a position. "Recommend a Friend" also turned out to be very beneficial., with 24 suggestions being put forward for us to approach.

We then held a candidate briefing and virtual hustings event for all candidates. Currie and Alison hosted and chaired this event, where all 17 of our candidates were given the space to

talk more about themselves, their campaign, manifesto pledges and take any questions our wider membership may have had for them. Whilst we had a small problem with Dzifa's microphone, we were able to publish a short video of the candidate on our website so that all candidates were given the space to introduce themselves and answer questions relating to the role they were running for. We saw a great turnout, with 35 students attending the meeting. Following hustings, voting opened on 22nd of April and closed on the 24th of April.

I would firstly like to congratulate all of our new officers on being elected to their roles. I am excited to be working with you all and look forward to the year ahead!

I would also like to thank Alison and Currie for all their hard work and continued dedication to the roles, despite the global pandemic and the quick changes we have had to implement in such an important process.

Activities and Support for Students

Due to the nature of COVID-19, we have had to work hard to provide accessible virtual events for our postgraduate community. We have hosted Netflix Watch Parties, a weekly coffee morning and have trialled virtual lunches. We have also been virtually attending the theatre with our students. We have provided students with guidance on working from home and how to better your wellbeing in the current climate. We have also continued to update our students on University communications. Based on feedback that we have received from our students, we have set out a COVID-19 section on our website. This features our weekly events, direct links to the postgraduate forum and FAQs regarding University communication. Here we have offered a simplified version of University comms and have expanded on what guidance means for students. We have also added a feedback form for any questions students might have that have not been answered, and a direct link to the updated Hardship Fund application. We have also been providing a video round-up, which enables the committee members to let students know that we are still there for them, provide top tips on things to do at home and update students on university communications.

We have been working alongside PGR reps to pick up any issues that PGR students might be facing currently. We are taking a collaborative approach to raise these issues with the Keele Doctoral Academy.

We have provided a video for our students entitled "Hey, it's Okay", to reassure our students that it is okay not to be working at "business as usual" levels. We have released materials on our website for students to access wellbeing support as part of this campaign.

I have been continuing to write my Presidential Monthly Reports to update students on University comms and to let them know what the KPA are doing to engage postgraduates. Another report is due to be circulated at the start of June. It is worth noting that all student concerns are being picked up by Currie, as I am currently working hard with Alison and the board of trustees on running the Association.

Clubhouse Matters

The University has been providing us with support on our Clubhouse finances and our staff. All of the Clubhouse staff have been furloughed from the 21st of March. We closed the Clubhouse officially from this date too. Some good news about the Clubhouse is that in March 2020 the Clubhouse Manager, Julia, and I wrote two applications to the Key Fund. The applications were for £10,000 worth of work to replace the flooring in the Clubhouse, £4,000 to buy new furniture and £6,000 for redecoration and paintwork, which came to £20,000 in

total. Both applications were accepted and we are thrilled that we will be able to re-develop our Clubhouse for our postgraduate students! We hope that this work can be undertaken as soon as lockdown restraints can be lifted.

Priorities going forward...

Handover for new officers will be during the month of June and starts next week. I have created a full handover guide for all committee members and sabbatical officers alike. Aside from that, we will be ensuring that our new committee has as much contact time as possible with current committee members (whether it be virtually or in person). We also have two full days of training provisionally booked in with the professional development team in July for our new officers. This will encourage team building, good practice and expectations of the role.

I will also be working to ensure that as many online activities as possible will happen for students. Currently I am working on a KPA Film Festival that will encourage our membership to submit short films that they have created on their phones. We will then create a video with all submissions, that will be played during a watch party. Members will then be able to vote on the best film and the winning contestant will be awarded a prize. This will enable our students to engage with creativity, and may be of benefit for those who are studying film and media. It will also show how much we should celebrate and value the arts, as it is something we are all relying on to keep us entertained in the current climate.

We have been made aware that Keele's Hardship Fund will be extended this year. The process of applying, I am told, is much easier in light of COVID-19. I will continue to lobby for specific pots of money to be allocated to both our PGR and PGT students who increasingly struggle with hardship and affording basic necessities. I am also told this money will also cover the cost of equipment for students who do not have laptops or software to continue their work from home.

We will also be looking into how we can host virtual study sessions for our postgraduate membership. This may include a structured approach, ensuring that we are taking time out time for a virtual lunch meeting and virtual coffee breaks throughout the day. This may take the same format as our regular "writing retreats" that we have always hosted in the Clubhouse for our students over the summer months.

I will continue to lobby for our PGT students, who have been offered extensions in Keele's "Safety Net Policy". Whilst this is seemingly a good thing, students are likely to incur financial hardships such as forking out for extra bills and rent. We are also lobbying for a protection plan for students who are not getting the correct support or are lacking contact from their supervisors, in light of COVID-19.

We will continue to work with the University to resolve issues for our PGR community. I am told that all extensions will be offered on a case by case basis, due to disparities in funding bodies. You are also being encouraged to speak to your supervisor in the very first instance to see what your options are. We know that sometimes in PGR study, students suffer with poor supervision. You are being asked to directly report this to us if you are having these problems so that you are protected and we can work with the University to resolve the issue. All supervisors have been sent guidance on this approach and are encouraged to meet regularly virtually with their students. We are still waiting on guidance from the student loans company regarding unfunded PhDs, we will continue, with the Keele Doctoral Academy, to

push for some answers. In the meantime, the University is actively encouraging you to apply for the Hardship Fund. They have simplified this so that it is easier to apply. The link can be found on our website. We will ensure to the best of our ability that PGR students are satisfied and supported with the outcome.

b) Report by Currie Agyeman, Vice President

Much of the work CA has been involved in had already been mentioned in the President's report. Other activities included CA's "Knock on the Door" campaign, to encourage international students in particular to come out of their rooms / halls of residence and get involved in KPA activities. This offer of support was embraced by some, who became more engaged with KPA life which reduced their feelings of isolation. CA has also been involved in Decolonising the Curriculum, attending meetings with senior leadership and working with KITE to bring about an improved approach. CA has interacted with many people and has successfully persuaded numerous students to stand for election who may not otherwise have put themselves forward. Thanks were expressed to Katie, who has been an excellent President and colleague. The KPA office had been a good atmosphere to work in and CA would particularly like to thank Martin Goodhead and Sophia Taha, who taught him not to be afraid to speak up. CA believes the new Committee will be the best one ever.

c) Report by Sharon Yang, Association Secretary

SY reported that her main task throughout the year was to circulate the Weekly Digest, to promote KPA and other events happening on and off campus, to attract postgraduates from across the University. The weekly digest was stopped from mid-February onwards, due to covid-19, as most of the activities and events that had been planned were postponed. This has been replaced by a KPA Weekly Roundup, which is delivered by a different committee member each week and is also available on the KPA website.

SY also acted as the Chief Returning Officer during the by-election in November 2019. She and Currie Agyeman (Deputy Returning Officer) prepared all relevant materials for the election, which arose due to the International Officer, Dee Alimi, standing down. Archit Tamboli was duly elected to the role. SY and CA created a series of posters and events to make people aware of the timetable for the said election, and encouraged the postgraduates to nominate themselves or recommend their friends. Communications were circulated via the weekly digest, our mail-list, and other social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In the meantime, in order to promote female participation, a "She Should Run" event was held, where women Committee members, including SY, spoke about what had motivated them to put themselves forward for election. SY would specifically like to credit Currie for his work as Vice President & Deputy Returning Officer, Alison as Coordinator, and also Sophia Taha as Activity Officer and Amy Blaney as student trustee, thanking them for all their support.

For the election in March / April 2020, SY did not act as the Chief Returning Officer, as she was running for the role of Vice President. However, along with other Committee members she created a video about her role and wrote a brief role description, to promote more interest in the Association Secretary position.

SY also acted as a representative of the postgraduate student body and a trustee of the KPA, attending regular meetings and managing the interests of the charity. Covid-19 has affected a range of different meetings, events, and activities which are now hosted online. Attending

regular meetings via Google Hangouts, and Jitsi Meet has enabled all committee members to carry out their tasks as usual. SY has also attended the KPA's weekly virtual coffee mornings via Google Hangouts. This brings postgraduates together to share their daily experiences in self isolation. It is particularly beneficial to international students who remain in the UK, as it reduces homesickness and loneliness.

5. Members' comments / suggestions / feedback:

NB There were no motions received for this meeting.

ST commented on how hard the outgoing Committee had worked this year, whether in paid positions or voluntary. There was great diversity amongst the Committee this year, which was a very positive improvement on previous years. ST particularly thanked Gabriella Gay for her contribution as Equality & Diversity Officer. Together the Committee brought new people in and it was a much more effective and interactive team. The Clubhouse were also commended for their work during Freshers Week to raise the profile of the KPA.

AB stated that the trustees were impressed by all the work that had been done. Julia Lawton had worked extremely hard all year, particularly prior to being furloughed in March. All KPA Clubhouse staff remain on furlough at the present time. Alison Tansey had also worked hard behind the scenes.

6. Adoption of 2018-19 KPA Accounts by the Membership

The Accounts were circulated well in advance of the meeting and had been made available on the KPA website. There were no queries or comments. All those present voted to adopt the accounts as a true and accurate record.

7. Any Other Business

DB raised concerns about the Covid-19 situation and some international students having to go home and then return to Keele to complete their studies. This has caused them difficulty and some are waiting for the University to inform them of when they should return. KC asked DB to email her with the specific concerns so these could be passed on to the University.

End of meeting