

SUSS-EX CLUB

Agenda for Steering Group meeting 5

Friday 20 April 2007 at 5.00pm

DARO Meeting Room, 1st floor, Bramber House

Attending from Steering Group:

Sir Gordon Conway (*Chairman*)

Bob Benewick

David Betts

Adrian Peasgood

Jackie Fuller

Charles Goldie

Willie Lamont

Valerie Cromwell

Steve Pavey

Jennifer Platt

In attendance:

Roger Walkinton (DARO)

1. **Apologies for absence:**

Mike English

Ken Wheeler

Christine Glasson

Mike Land (*who has asked to step down*)

2. **Approval of minutes of 26 January 2007 meeting**

Matters arising not covered elsewhere

Replacement for Mike Land?

3. **Club structure and administration:**

Consider and make recommendations on the sub-committee report prepared by Jackie Fuller, Steve Pavey and Adrian Peasgood

4. **Activities updates:**

- Simon Fanshawe talk; any other ideas in pipeline (Bob Benewick)
- David Streeter walk 13 May (Ken Wheeler) – 12 so far
- Wakehurst visit 27 June (David Betts) – 4 so far
- House of Lords dinner 29 October (Jackie Fuller)

5. **Database:**

- Volunteers who have offered to help compile further names and addresses:
Michael Jamieson (English/ENGAM), Mike English (Engineering)
- Action to recruit further 'volunteers'?

6. **Items for next Newsletter:** any suggestions?

7. **AOB**

Date of next meeting (and talk?)

(Drink, supper and talk by Simon Fanshawe will follow from 7pm in IDS, for those staying on – buffet supper @ £15 plus drink. Please let Roger Walkinton know on r.e.walkinton@sussex.ac.uk if you have not already done so and are planning to attend this event.)

Suss-Ex: next steps

Discussion paper from Jackie Fuller, Steve Pavey, Adrian Peasgood

Summary We identified the following core issues which will dictate how Suss-Ex might develop. The paper explores these in more detail. Ideally these need to be clarified prior to getting into the detail of formal structure.

- a) Objects and Purposes
- b) Relationship with the University (and the level of practical support we can expect)
- c) Financial matters
- d) Membership and inclusivity
- e) Responsibilities and role of the Steering Committee and any sub-groups
- f) Delegation to individuals
- g) Constitution and Governance

Appendix 1 provides URLs of the websites of three analogous bodies.

Appendix 2 (by Steve) provides summary histories of Town & Gown and the University of Sussex Society.

1. We think that before the Suss-Ex group is formalised there should be a clear choice between two main kinds of future organisation: 1) a purely social group operating quite independently of the University, or 2) a social group with an avowed additional aim of supporting the University in various ways. The benefits of option (1) include autonomy, those of option (2) include the expectation of University assistance with administration, etc. (We are aware of the assistance already received from the Development and Alumni Office, and would expect, if option 2 were adopted, that Suss-Ex would have a formal position related to DAO.)

We think that the strengths of Suss-Ex will lie in deciding on, and running, events: maintaining a database of members, handling any subscriptions which might be introduced (and/or income and expenditure on events) could be a burden on volunteers, and might not be done with maximum efficiency. On the other hand, expecting Suss-Ex and DAO to agree on routines and procedures – not a trivial task – might be premature unless and until a second year of operation confirms that there is indeed a role for Suss-Ex, and not just novelty value sufficient to fill one year's programme.

It is important that the choice be made before further formalisation occurs, since the roles to be filled by those running the group will not be the same in the two cases, notably the overheads of membership administration and book-keeping, but also the extent of contact with the University. And it would be unreasonable to expect anyone to agree to become Chair – we assume

that Gordon will not wish to remain with that role once the group is properly up and running - without knowing which kind of group they were to be responsible for. And Suss-Ex, like any group, will require a Chair with time and commitment sufficient to ensure its continued vigour.

2. We think that the existing commitment to developing a group which is hospitable to all former staff, not just ex Faculty, is right, and we note the Christmas party as an example of a programme item achieving this. But we note that steering group members remain overwhelmingly ex Faculty, and consider that diversification to include two or three non Faculty members as soon as possible is essential if non Faculty are to feel welcome as rank and file members and thus participants in group activities. The group is not yet inclusive enough. This diversification may follow from the unit-based membership drive proposed at the last meeting; if it does not, a targeted initiative will be needed. Getting adequate non Faculty representation on the steering group should ensure that in the transition to a formal committee structure there will be both a Faculty and a non Faculty pool on which to draw.

We noted above that the experience of year two should show how viable Suss-Ex really is. It might suggest that the greater inclusivity we seek is unlikely to be achieved. We need to retain an option to accept that, for whatever reason, Suss-Ex will be primarily (though not, we trust, formally and exclusively) an ex Faculty group. But a conscious and determined effort to give it a wider range needs to be made first.

3. We think that moving to a formal committee structure should begin during the coming summer, which would require that by the end of the summer term we have (1) determined the basic character of the group, and (2) made adequate progress towards diversification of steering group membership. We think that this probably implies identifying as soon as possible someone willing and able to ensure that both conditions are met, which will be someone in a position to encourage others to take on delegated responsibilities for parts of this programme, and accepted by all as authorised to do so. The title of Chair being already held by Gordon, some other term will be needed for this person; it might be that the person concerned would transmute into the first Chair within a formal committee structure, being identified as such at the inaugural meeting mentioned below, with Gordon being re-designated as President, or similar.

4. We think that the process of moving to a more formal structure will follow many precedents: most groups begin life either self-selected, or brought together by someone's initiative, and after a period announce an inaugural meeting at which the existing members suggest how initial officerships should be filled for a first year of operation. After that year an AGM is held at which there is the opportunity for changes in the team, whether originated from within it, or by nominations, etc. from the wider membership. As already noted, we do not feel that we can yet propose either the officerships which will be required, or a suitably balanced initial team of office-bearers. But we should aim at having the inaugural meeting just mentioned during the autumn term, presumably in conjunction with a suitable programme event. The

proposals to the inaugural meeting would be developed during the summer and early in the autumn term, in the light of what had been achieved by the end of the summer term in respect of the issues raised above. The details of a constitution should not present difficulties: there are many precedents on which we can draw.

Appendix 1: similar associations at other universities

We found websites of several broadly similar organisations. It appears that there are rather more associations which are simply lunch clubs than there are like Suss-Ex, with a more varied programme. However, the following are sites of associations with programmes like ours:

Queen Mary: www.hr.qmul.ac.uk/RSA

Warwick: www2.warwick.ac.uk/assoc/rsa

Exeter: www.groups.ex.ac.uk/uersa

Just how close the various associations are to their universities is not always clear. All seem to do their own administration, but all have space on the institutional website. All charge a subscription, but whether the institutions provide any support for the membership secretaries or treasurers would need direct contact with appropriate officers to elicit.

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Appendix 2: earlier Sussex affinity associations

A. Town and Gown Club (T&GC)

1. T&GC was pretty active in the 1980s and 1990s, not least because of the enthusiasm of the then Registrar. The role was to make a 'bridge' between the University community and the communities of Brighton & Hove and the wider county of Sussex. Membership was informal, effectively by way of being on the mailing list. The 'members' tended to be older academics and administrators from the Gown side; and senior people in business, public service and the voluntary sector from the Town side.

2. The main activity of T&GC was to hold evening buffet events – usually, but not exclusively – on campus in what is now Bramber House. The events would normally consist of wine on arrival plus a modest buffet with table seating, and an after dinner speaker. The talk would be usually given by an academic speaking, in lay terms, about his specialist subject, or occasionally by a locally based expert. Events were normally on a Friday evening; maybe five or six times a year

3. T&GC had no formal structure as such. All the organisational work was carried out by the University admin (mostly through the Conference Office) and speakers were usually invited by the Registrar. Events were priced so as to simply cover direct costs, and to encourage a good attendance. There was no overt attempt for T&GC to be fund raising, and it concentrated on both the social side, and in raising the profile of the University in the city.

B. University of Sussex Society (UoSS)

1. Active from early days, it was a voluntary group (with limited support from the University) which existed to keep graduates in touch with each other and with the University. The conventional structure of an elected steering committee etc. was in place. Events such as class reunions and social get-togethers in London, Brighton and elsewhere were regularly organised. A newsletter (Falmer) was also produced.

2. In the early 1990s the University created the Alumni & Development Office, and this began to give much more proactive support to UoSS. The society was encouraged to become involved in fund raising, and slowly it metamorphosed into what is now the Alumni Network of today (look at the alumni pages of the US website to see what this offers). Membership is now free and automatic.

3. The logic of the University 'taking over' the old UoSS, and effectively disbanding it, was to focus the alumni effort much more on fund raising, in return for which the University gave resources (both financial and practical) to much improve the services offered to graduates.

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