

minutes

Venues Development & Oversight Board – 7th February 2019

Present

Sophie Atherton (Campaigns & Democracy Officer) (*Chair*)

Oli Gray (Activities Officer) (*Clerk*)

Harry Bowen (Non-portfolio Officer)

Daniel Cockburn-Evans (Student Representative)

Connie Mann (LCR Student Manager)

Andy Watts (Assistant Director of Social Enterprise)

Zoe Phillips (Commercial Sales & Marketing Manager)

Carl Wright (Student Events Manager).

Apologies

Wendy Storey (Assistant Director of Social Enterprise)

Katie Steele (Catering Student Manager)

Saleen Chowdhury (LCR Student Manager)

Jenn Hulse (Bars Student Manager)

Statements from the chair

The Chair thanked attendees for coming and the committee approved minutes from the previous meeting.

Performance review of sales

AW introduced the paper (page 5 of the agenda). Key headlines mentioned: we held 9 less events September-December; 7 of which were self-promoted gigs where we take a higher proportion of the risk involved in hosting an event (3 of last years were loss making) meaning we paid VMS less in fees. We are currently exiting the contract with VMS which will bring further savings long term.

Club night attendance increased by approximately 5000 people in total, driven by a good A list presence and despite a slight reduction in attendances at Damn Good. The variation in attendance ('no show' figure) has gone down from 6.6% to 2.5%, potentially because of better recording at the door through MSL. Staffing costs have been lower than forecast but this is likely to be because of unfilled vacancies. Overall the LCR is up £75k against budget and £59k against last year.

Last year, there were 3 major loss-making events for refreshers in January 2018, this year we had none, meaning there was a £20k improvement to contribution, particularly by making changes such as the comedy offering by bringing in James Acaster and having a mix of seated and standing.

Coding in commercial sales has changed this year and therefore difficult to directly compare against last year's figures. There's been an increased contribution from booking fees, which could relate to the transition from Ticket ABC to MSL. This is still in progress as many of our gigs are uploaded onto Ticket ABC months in advance.

ZP clarified that the move to MSL means that, of the 10% booking fee charged to the public (in line with competitor standards), the cost of each transaction has decreased to 1.1% plus 22p, resulting in an increased 8.9% contribution.

OG asked if it remains that this cost still only applies to members of the public and not UEA students.

ZP explained that the public are charged a 10% booking fee which is a similar level to other entertainment providers in the sector, and that all students are charged for transactions at cost price, which is 1.1% + 22p, meaning no surplus is made on booking fees from students.

Results of QC Students Voice Report (Bars & Kitchen)

ZP explained that from the outcomes of the QCs and focus groups, the SU will launch marketing material around the use of space during the daytime in the SU bars. This marketing will also feature some Frequently Asked questions, for example around our ownership of the Fries Van, despite this not being clear from its branding and presence outside of our building.

CM asked if the fries van be selling more than the fries in the future.

HB added burgers would also be good.

ZP explained that the rollover hotdogs, currently being trialled in the bar, will be added into the Fries Van, to expand its offering (preferable before Easter).

DCE asked which local pubs will be compared? As outlets such as Wetherspoons may be cheaper than our venues for certain products and offer a larger product range.

ZP clarified that it's important that we're honest in these comparisons and admit that we are cheaper than some outlets (including Wetherspoons) on certain products, as well as stocking particular drinks like VK at a value price which is popular with students. We also aim to share our business decisions by explaining the buying power that Wetherspoons has compared to us, as well as raising the ethical issue of not wanting to get students shitfaced and mentioning alcohol impact.

AW added that over time we will also look at price comparison beyond our drinks offering.

Focus groups

ZP explained that focus groups have not yet been held but planning is underway. The theme for the bar focus group will be around 'space', with a deliberate intention on not focusing on price as this will be addressed in the above mentioned marketing

campaign. The kitchen focus group will focus on product range, with an aim of finding out which products are wanted and what students feel are missing from the offering.

CM explained that the LCR focus group will centre around freshers week, focusing on the Thursday comedy night and Wednesday Block Party and if these are wanted by students and how they can be shaped.

AW added that during freshers week this year, the block party was one of the most successful nights of the week. We tried to replicate this for refreshers week and had nowhere near the same results. Initial feedback indicates that this decline was because it was not a block party and this is potentially because we didn't have the 'right' act. Overall the phrase 'block party' is a red herring, with mixed response from students.

DCE asked if there any ways we can mitigate the sticky floors in our venues.

ZP has researched this intensely and explain that it is extremely difficult, particularly as one of our top selling products is VK which is essentially sugar and water. We've increased the number of cleaning staff on duty during evening / night time events to deal with spills as they happen. The only method to deal with this once the event has finished is to hire in a specialist company to deal with this which is likely to cost thousands of pounds and therefore unrealistic. Our marketing is now steered towards 'owning it', for example the marketing used for last year's exit ball included all the things students love about a typical night out in the LCR, including toilet gossips and sticky floors.

AW added that as laws change to reduce the amount of sugar in drinks, this should help the situation.

CM further added that the deep cleans of the venues also help

ZP explained that this was also considered when the LCR (including flooring) was refurbished. We will happily accept any recommendations if anyone has a miracle product to suggest.

Scope for Exit Ball, Graduation Ball, & Welcome Week

ZP introduced the topic, explaining that the festival theme for Exit Ball will continue as students favour the ability to move between outdoors and indoors and the variety of activities to do. VMS has been contacted to bring in acts, and a number of 'breakthrough' artists have been considered. Once this is finalised, we'll seek students' feedback on who they want to see. This year's exit ball will be held on 14th June 2019.

Planning for this year's Graduation Ball has not yet begun. We received great feedback from last year's event by combining a live act and a DJ element, so this year we'll look to replicate something similar. Graduation Ball takes place mid-July and is a smaller event in terms of number of attendees, meaning it's more difficult to secure a bigger lineup.

For welcome week, we have a focus group planned and will await feedback for that. The challenge with this is that an act who is big now may not be big all the way in September, so this can prove challenging.

OG raised that he is lobbying the university to introduce a 'week zero', essentially starting the academic term a week early which will not include any core academic teaching, allowing students to better transition into university life. This means there will be obvious implications for our evening entertainments programme (particularly if considerably less students have early morning lectures) but also presents opportunities for our daytime provision, for example with commercial partnerships.

AW enquired if this means there is a danger of events selling out quicker due to a sudden increase in demand.

ZP warned we need to be careful as we operate many events at capacity during freshers and the majority sell out, as well as implications for third parties we work with to provide a week 2 freshers. These will all need to be considered carefully.

Action: look into sales and survey data to determine the proportion of students who didn't attend to.

OG added that, if approved by the university, the earliest that week zero would be implemented would be September 2020, so we don't need to be concerned about the upcoming welcome week this year.

AOB nothing raised. The chair thanked everyone for coming.

Next meeting will be held 9th May 2019 at 5pm in Bookable Room 1.