

**SUSS-EX CLUB
STEERING GROUP MEETING 11
AGENDA
FRIDAY 30TH JANUARY 2009 AT 5.00PM**

**DEVELOPMENT AND ALUMNI RELATIONS OFFICE MEETING ROOM,
BRAMBER HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

1. Writing the minutes
– volunteer needed
2. Apologies for absence
3. Matters arising (n.e.c.) from last meeting
4. Steering Group Membership
- Willie Lamont's resignation
5. Christmas Party – 17th December 2008
- Report and feedback - attached
6. Items for February 2009 newsletter
7. Obituaries (Gilford Ward, Alan Weir, Michael Ward)
8. Dinners Policy Discussion – attached
9. Forthcoming Activities
- Talks – Bob Benewick
- Trip to the Dogs – Trevor Beeforth
- Tour by Geoff Mead – Nancy Holmes
10. Research contributions - attached
11. Any other business

2008 Christmas Party report

As before, our party was run in conjunction with the USPAS pension scheme, whose pensioners were all invited; Tracey Llewellyn of the USPAS office shared the organisational work, and thanks are due to volunteers from both USPAS and Suss Ex who helped with a variety of tasks. (Two ladies from Payroll did the drinks, and enjoyed the novel experience of meeting some of the people they deal with.) The model established last year was followed again, with a lunchtime occasion in the Meeting House Quiet Room providing a finger buffet, and both wine and non-alcoholic punch. As far as one can judge it worked well socially, and the food and drink appeared popular and sufficient.

Attendance is treated, on the basis of the numbers responding to the invitations, as 114, with 41 from Suss Ex (very similar to 2007). Total expenditure on food and drink was £540.02, of which Suss Ex's share is therefore £194.22. Since Suss Ex took in £225 in payment for tickets, that leaves us with a modest profit. (De facto, our prices meant that couples were slightly subsidised by people coming on their own, and did not contribute towards the profit.) The difference from last year's trivial loss is accounted for not just by our £1 rise in ticket price, but also by the fact that we benefited for the first time from the University's provision of the room free of charge. As last year, as much as possible of the drink was bought on supermarket special offers. Although we provided less than last year, when a fair amount was left over, there was still a fair amount left over this time; the juices were absorbed into the Goldie family budget, and the wines sold to the Maths department wine stock at cost price. (I wonder if there is storage space anywhere on campus in which leftover wine could be kept for the following year?)

Some practical details have been noted for future years. Equal quantities of red and white wine were provided, but the red ran out and rosé aroused little interest; more red seems desirable. The crisis caused last year by the late discovery that some of the finger food from Waitrose needed cooking was avoided by sharing out between us the task of cooking everything that needed it the night before; result, no last-minute crisis, but food not so pleasantly warm. Fairly ordinary small sandwiches went faster than exotic canapés whose content was not obvious, and it was clear that more mince pies and Stollen would have been favourably received.

One advantage of our policy of aiming to make a small profit on appropriate events was meant to be that it could provide a float which could be drawn on for expenditure necessarily made before payments for events comes in. That does not appear to work very well here. I enquired about the possibility of getting some expenses in advance, and found that in practice it did not appear to exist; for some organisers that might be a problem. But even if it were very easily accessible, the difficulty of estimating accurately how much will be needed means that it would be complicated to arrange the disposition of any surplus food and drink.

Paying for room hire at the Meeting House is charged initially to the Suss-ex Club budget and then this will be adjusted at year end to be met by the Registrar.

Jennifer Platt.

SUSS-EX CLUB MEETING ON FRIDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2008

DISCUSSION NOTE ON HOUSE OF LORDS DINNER (27.10.07), CITY COLLEGE DINNER (2.10.08) AND DINNERS IN GENERAL

1. **Why have a discussion about Suss-Ex Club dinners at this meeting of the Steering Group?**

I thought that now would actually be a good time to have a *post mortem* about the two we have held so far so that we can consider whether or not to arrange more in the future. Questions that the Steering Group might like to consider are:

- (i) What worked well, what worked less well? The attached summary table is my first attempt to try to think about this (the cells shown in bold are the ones I consider to be particularly critical). *Members of the Steering Group are invited to flesh out this table with additional comments of their own or from feedback they have received from others attending the events.*
- (ii) Given some of the problems, especially getting sufficient numbers committed well before the date of the events, should we continue to try to organise this kind of dinner?
- (iii) If yes, would there be a danger of diminishing interest if we just did a straight repeat of one or both of these events in the future (on the basis of 'been there, done that, got the T-shirt' type reactions)? For an event at the House of Lords especially but actually for any event involving a prestigious speaker it would be very embarrassing for Suss-Ex to have to cancel!
- (iv) Alternatively, are there other interesting venues at which Suss-Ex might consider organising an annual event or dinner and which might excite sufficient early interest from members?
- (v) Or should we perhaps now try organising something rather different (i.e. change the basic format of a formal sit-down dinner with after dinner speaker)? And if so, what?

2. **Finance** The two dinners have both paid their way and have also generated a surplus for Suss-Ex. This was achieved by careful budgeting based on a fairly cautious assumption about minimum numbers attending, as well as being sure to build in all the hidden costs (these included free places for the speaker and host, extras imposed by the venue, gratuities, VAT, a contingency element and also the agreed margin of surplus). Copies of final Income & Expenditure statements for the two dinners are attached for information.

3. **For the future who should decide?** I feel that a decision on future big events should be made by the Steering Committee as a group given our experiences so far as well as the various risks and work involved and should not just be left to one individual's views or enthusiasms. This is because these risks affect Suss-Ex *as a whole* and are not just financial (and they do not occur in quite the same way with other types of event organised by Suss-Ex such as theatre trips).

So over to you to discuss....

Jackie Fuller
30/10/2008

HOUSE OF LORDS (Oct 2007)		CITY COLLEGE (Oct 2008)	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Prestigious venue and very good ambience overlooking the river etc. Also good area for pre-dinner drinks.	Very expensive (£65) – and esp. when travelling expenses also taken into consideration	Very reasonably priced tickets for a 4-course Table d'Hôte meal with wine and coffee (£25)	Venue adequate but not especially attractive (no table decorations etc, although they do have them at Christmas). Bar area rather cramped.
Prestigious speaker and host (Baronesses Shirley Williams & Margaret Sharp respectively)	Price + travelling expenses probably a disincentive to attend for some members (and perhaps esp. for former support staff members on lower pensions)	Did finally ensure a good turnout for Vice-Chancellor's first contact with and address to Suss-Ex Club	Less prestigious venue, so perhaps less incentive to book for the event
	Very difficult to budget for the event because ticket price had to be set 3-4 mths before the venue issued its new price list (revised in Sept each year), which did then involve some hefty increases! (But fortunately a generous contingency had been built in.)	Easy to budget, as no hidden 'extras'	Some former support staff members did book for the event but not as many as might have been hoped.
	Organiser had to decide on a menu on behalf of all guests - a bit of a gamble in case the choice wasn't to everyone's liking. No flexibility.	Organiser didn't need to decide on menu as guests were able to choose themselves from the Table d'Hôte menu (incl. vegetarian options).	Organiser wasn't told there would be a temporary table arrangement in the middle of the room (because of furniture repairs), which then didn't 'fit' the table plan which had been prepared.

Cuisine generally considered to be of high standard	New price list also included changed menu options, so menu which had been chosen from 2006/7 list and had been communicated to members with the booking form were no longer valid! Organiser had to make decisions on final menu without being able to inform guests in advance of their booking.	Meal cooked by the catering students was generally considered to be of a high standard	
Table service professional	Office staff not very efficient or helpful. Also some lack of communication between them and the Maitre d. (Some requirements had to be repeated on the night even though everything had been specified clearly in the correspondence.)	Table service by students generally good although a bit slow and some 'silver service' conventions weren't followed (any inadequacies are considered to be the fault of the supervisor, not the students!)	Some lack of communication between office staff and students' supervisor. Some correspondence in which requirements had been specified (e.g. the wine) was not on the file he had been given (but fortunately the organiser had brought copies with her on the night!)
Good feedback from those attending (organiser received several very positive thank you letters and emails)	Very difficult to sell sufficient number of tickets early enough in order to confirm the booking. (There are sliding scale penalties for late cancellations of events.)	Some positive thank you letters and emails received after the event.	Very difficult to sell sufficient number of tickets early enough in order to confirm exclusive use of venue (essential for our event which involved an after dinner speaker). Also there would have been a penalty for late cancellation.
	Members generally seem unwilling to book for events several months in advance. Several reminders had to be sent out and finally Charles Goldie had to assist the organiser by personally appealing to members to book for the event via UoS email list.		Members generally seem unwilling to book for events several months in advance. Several reminders had to be sent out and finally Charles Goldie had to assist the organiser by personally appealing to members to book for the event via UoS email list.

	When seated around tables of 10, members can only talk easily to those seated on either side, although the sherry reception at the beginning did enable a little more social interaction.	Venue easily accessible either by public transport or by car	When seated around tables of 10 members can only talk easily to those seated on either side. Some would have liked more opportunity to circulate. (Also there wasn't much room in the bar area for guests to circulate a bit before sitting down to dinner.)
	Organisation involved quite a lot of administrative work, such as providing lists of guests to HofL for security vetting and checking at Black Rod's entrance; designing, printing and mailing personalised invitation cards to be presented on arrival, and so on.	Not too much administrative work involved.	
	Organiser needed assistance to decide on table allocations and places through not knowing many of the guests personally (Charles & Jennifer obliged!).		Organiser needed assistance to decide on table allocations and places through not knowing many of the guests personally (Charles & Jennifer obliged!).

Research Contributions by Retired Staff

The RAE is to be followed by new arrangements, but it seems likely that it will always be advantageous for those of us who, in formal retirement, continue to contribute to research and wish to continue our relationship with the academic life of the university for our research contributions to be noted. Might it be an idea, therefore, for us to invite members to send in the details of any publications over the past year and to publish a list, which could be sent on to the administration if that seemed appropriate to make the point that we are worth having around?

Jennifer Platt
January 2009