

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX SUSS-EX CLUB

Steering Group Meeting no. 4

Minutes – Friday 26 January 2007

Development & Alumni Relations, Bramber House

Present:

Sir Gordon Conway (*Chairman*)
Bob Benewick
David Betts
Jackie Fuller
Willie Lamont
Mike Land
Adrian Peasgood
Steve Pavey
Jennifer Platt
Ken Wheeler

In attendance:

Roger Walkinton (DARO)

Apologies:

Valerie Cromwell
Mike English
Christine Glasson
Charles Goldie
'Kenny' Kenefick (note - standing down)
Richard Price (Staff Welfare)
Dominic Tickell (DARO)

Apologies for absence

Noted as above. The Chairman also put on record the group's welcome to Roger who has resumed his original role in the DARO on a permanent part-time basis.

Approval of minutes of 13 October 2006

Approved - with matters arising covered below.

1. Activities:

2006 Christmas party Jennifer presented her report (attached Appendix 1) showing that only some £190 would be needed from the USPAS budget allocation. It was agreed that for 2007 the following would be looked at:

- Double-check accuracy of database
- Invite USPAS and non-USPAS simultaneously and earlier than before
- Move event to a lunchtime to avoid darkness issue
- Consider buying platters of pre-prepared Sainsbury's food
- Wear badges
- Provisionally book Meeting House Quiet Room for Friday 14 December 2007 (RW since done)

Talks

The sub-committee chaired by Bob Benewick will look into further talks, considering both form and style, aiming at possibly one per term. Suggestions included Tom (?) Crowe now at the Getty, Simon Fanshawe and Jan Thole (ex-Sports Centre, spotted in Eastenders!). Possibly aim to hold next one in April after next Steering Group.

House of Lords dinner

Jackie Fuller presented her research which shows that to date over 30 have expressed interest, that overall costs look likely to require a ticket price of £65, that it can be cancelled with no penalty up until 3 months before, and that it is now important, to attract maximum numbers and make the event viable, to find a good speaker for no fee; an approach will be made initially to Baroness Shirley Williams. Deadline of May/June to finalise the format and arrangements before promoting it.

Walks

Ken Wheeler presented options for an Ashdown Forest walk led by David Streeter. Sunday 13 May was considered the best, with 25/30 walkers the optimum and the suggestion of car-pooling to be advertised when arrangements are finalised.

Theatre

Jennifer Platt took the initiative to book tickets for 3 further plays at the Theatre Royal in Brighton even though attendance by fewer than 10 people for two of them will not qualify for the group reduction rate: this was not seen as a problem.

Stately home visit

David Betts is looking into a guided tour of Wakehurst Place (NT but leased to Kew) possibly on the afternoon of Wednesday 27 June; note NT members can get in free.

2. Database

Charles Goldie's paper was circulated (attached Appendix 2). It was agreed that DARO would continue to maintain the list of Suss-Ex names and addresses on the existing alumni database but that

(a) perhaps with the next Suss-Ex Newsletter mailing, the 400+ former staff currently on it would be specifically asked to opt IN to receiving future Suss-Ex communications so that (i) Data Protection matters are covered and (ii) dormant former staff are not wastefully mailed – which they also would be if they were asked to opt OUT

(b) DARO would then code the respondents so that one discrete core list could easily be drawn off by Suss-Ex without interfering with other DARO uses

Richard Price would be asked to continue promoting Suss-Ex in his annual mailing to pre-retirement staff members to raise awareness of its existence.

Members will be asked to volunteer to take lead responsibility for compiling additional names and addresses for relevant Schools, as for example Charles Goldie has already done for Maths, Mike Land (Biols), David Betts (Physics), Adrian Peasgood (Library), Valerie Cromwell and Maurice Hutt (Humanities) etc. This database-building exercise would be advertised in the next Newsletter. IDS should also be approached.

3. Club structure

After some discussion, it was agreed that a sub-committee convened by Adrian Peasgood with Steve Pavey and Jackie Fuller, would consider this matter further and email its summary - with at least two options - to the whole group by end February, so that a proposal can be circulated in the March newsletter and a decision made soon thereafter. There was a general feeling that a membership fee whether £5 or £10 might put people off at a time when we need to build numbers; although it would create a useful pump-priming kitty, Steve Pavey felt it might be better to approach the US for a pump-priming grant, in precisely the same way as the Alumni office itself was originally set up (with alumni not being charged to join it), and it was agreed that this should be done. Such a grant would in practice mostly find its way back to the US by payment of room hire charges anyway.

Gordon Conway foresaw a time when Suss-Ex Club might well be in a position to adopt a particular US project and make financial grants to it, which would thus make it in the US's interests to support the Club over and above current DARO staff time for which they are most grateful.

4. Items for next Newsletter: (for mailing probably in March)

- List of forthcoming activities
(Theatre trips, Ashdown Forest walk ?Sunday 13 May, Wakehurst Place visit ?Wed 27 June (both including car-pooling arrangements), House of Lords dinner ?Monday 29 October, Christmas party ?Friday 14 December) and associated booking proformas
- Opt-IN response mechanism to consolidate membership
- Call for database-building reps for each school/discipline, and for new people to join the steering group
- Christmas party report
- Gordon Conway talk report
- Website link addresses for Professorial Lectures and for Suss-Ex Club
- Final proposal on Suss-Ex club structure

AOB

RW gave out copies of the US Wills booklet to all members of the Suss-Ex steering group for their information - and consideration!

ALL TO NOTE: Next meeting scheduled for Friday 20 April 2007 at 5.00pm in the DARO Meeting Room in Bramber House (possibly followed by another talk)

Appendix 1

Christmas party 2006 - report

The party was held as planned. In the event our anxieties about having room for enough people were not justified, as the 61 who attended were well within the room's capacity, though it did not seem too empty, and having good circulation space and the opportunity for almost everyone to sit down were advantages. However, having more people there would have increased the social choice of who to talk to that one knew; perhaps name tags might help another time. The numbers were almost evenly divided between the Suss-Ex list and members of the USPAS pension scheme who were not on the list (though invited on the party announcement to join). The impression was that more would have come, at least from USPAS, at lunchtime.

The Meeting House setting worked well, with good kitchenette facilities and seating. Low Thomson, who did much of the organisational work, makes a mean low-alcohol punch, which was very well received. That kept him busy for most of the evening, so from that point of view much larger numbers would have made things hard; Alison Thomson also did a lot of valuable work on the night. The food contributions were fine, many of the Suss-Ex ones negotiated with me, though some minor problems were caused by latecomers bringing their offerings after others had helped themselves to what appeared to be all that there was, which at one point came to look rather sparse. Roger Walkinton and musical colleagues gave a very enjoyable performance, from a wide repertoire which included the accompaniment for some familiar carols. (We are grateful to the Meeting House for the Christmas gesture of not charging us for the use of the Chapel area for music.) We have a modest amount of disposable equipment left over, and a few more lasting dishes and servers; Low recommends the purchase of some large thermos flasks for future occasions.

Suss-Ex members were charged £7 for one or £12 for a couple, and asked to bring a contribution to the food; USPAS members were charged nothing, and it was suggested less pressingly that they might bring a contribution, as many of them did. Strict economy was observed in the central expenditure, with whatever was not food or drink bought from pound shops.

The costs incurred were:

Hire and portorage for Quiet Room.....	£205
Hire of cups and glasses.....	£35.25
Punch ingredients.....	£48.76
Bread, butter, cream.....	£14.88
Table decorations.....	£7.49
Plates, plastic utensils, paper napkins.....	£15.91
Total:	£327.29

The funding available was the £500 for USPAS from Staff Welfare, plus the £185 from the charges made to Suss-Ex members. In the event, thus, the 29 Suss-Ex members paid a little more than their proportionate share of the costs, though if, as originally expected, we had had to pay for the Chapel it would have been very close to their share – happily justifying our pricing policy. We contributed all the labour and more of the food, somewhat counterbalanced by the club's retention of the leftover equipment. I suggest that £190 be claimed from Staff Welfare (£5.37 per capita, rounded up towards costs of food and drink for helpers.) If as many people had come to the party from USPAS as last year, much more of the £500 would have been spent. Since room charges are a major item independent of how many come, per capita cost depends heavily on the number attending. The need for subsidy in future would depend on that and on the combination of charges and of the balance of food and drink costs and any guest food contributions. *Jennifer Platt.*

The list's status

It will be recalled that for the launch Reception on 6th April 2006 we were allowed to send invitations *through* HR's list of ex-staff, but were not given the list itself. Afterwards it became clear that there were huge omissions and a high proportion of errors in HR's list, so in many ways we were better off without it*. Our list of names of ex-staff, with contact details, therefore began with the 100 or so in the general alumni database of the Development & Alumni Relations Office (DARO); the DARO had these names because some are also alumni and others had expressed interest in keeping in touch, receiving *Falmer* or the Sussex Lectures leaflet, etc. That initial list has been augmented since by individuals writing in to have themselves included, having mostly heard about the Suss-Ex Club through existing participants, and by further lists provided by those existing participants. It now numbers about 400 names.

With hindsight it is clear that it would have been better if our list of 400 names and addresses had not been simply added in to the general alumni database held by the DARO. While the assistance of the DARO in maintaining the list has been invaluable, and much appreciated, the volunteer efforts that expanded the list to 400 were forthcoming on the basis that it was Suss-Ex's list, for the Suss-Ex Club as at present represented by this Steering Group to be able to mail to as it wishes. (From the start, all mailings have been on the basis that recipients will receive further mailings unless they actually opt out; there's thus a short subsidiary list of those who have opted out, and who won't be added to the mailing list even if suggested by someone.)

The Steering Group might therefore consider resolving that it would like the list separated from the general alumni database and placed in a convenient form in the hands of volunteer 'officers' of the Club.

Improving the coverage

Whole decades-full of ex-staff were missing from our initial coverage and have been added in only patchily since. A systematic trawl, subject by subject, can put that right, and I found by doing it for my own subject that it isn't too much work for a volunteer. In the case of Maths there are 30 retired faculty and 52 who left for other posts; also 7 admin/clerical staff who mainly worked for the subject. The list of names came from memory, assisted by the staff lists in old prospectuses. The departmental office had an accurate list of the retired, and for those that had left it was fairly easy to find contact details for all but 13 of the ex-faculty and all but one of the admin/clerical staff, using a combination of memory, the local phone book and Google.

I hope we can identify possible volunteers to attempt the task from each of the subjects/areas below. School allegiance, particularly in Arts & Social Sciences, used to be almost as strong or as strong as subject allegiance, but we must choose one method of dividing the task up (not two, or duplication would be inevitable), and subject seems on the whole best.

* The only accurate list of ex-staff is presumably that of USPAS pensioners and deferred pensioners, held by the USPAS pensions administrators. My understanding is that we have also been allowed to mail to this group but not been given the list itself.

Admin (central)
American Studies
Anthropology
Art History
Biochemistry
Biology (incl. ES)
CCE
Chemistry
CS/Informatics
Economics
Education
Engineering
English
French
Geography
German
History
IDS
IR
Law
Library
Linguistics
Maths
Media Studies
Music
Philosophy
Physics
Politics
Psychology: Experimental, Cognitive, Social
Russian
Social work
Sociology
SPRU
Technical staff
USCS/ITS

Charles Goldie
23rd January 2007