BHUTANESE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION (BSA)

ARMIDALE

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES

2020

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1. Introduction

Australia's diplomatic relationship with Bhutan began in the 1970s. Since then, the Royal Government of Bhutan has been a beneficiary of Australian support, especially in education, human resource development and health. The University of New England (UNE), Armidale, in New South Wales, Australia is one of the most important institutions that has produced some of the pioneers of the education system in Bhutan. The UNE has been an important old-time partner of Bhutan's education system and the number of Bhutanese students is increasing annually.

The Bhutanese Students' Association (BSA) of Armidale, was instituted on 18 March 2011 to maintain solidarity and promote welfare amongst Bhutanese. However, the presence of Bhutanese students in Armidale has a longstanding and broad history. It can be traced back to a historic educational relationship between Bhutan and the University of New England (UNE) established almost three decades ago. It began with the visit by the then Director General of Education, Dasho Thinley Gyamtsho in 1991 and subsequently as Honorable Minister of Education in 2006. These visits gave birth to the involvement of numerous academic staff of the UNE in several collaborative research and institutional partnerships with the Ministry of Education, the Royal University of Bhutan and its Colleges. The ties between the UNE and Royal Government of Bhutan was further expanded when a group of scholars from the Department of Forests and Park Services (DoFPS) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests undertook their graduate studies in Natural Resources Management between 2004 and 2006.

Dr Jim Irvine, Dr David Sloper, Dr David Laird, Dr Tom Maxwell, Dr Peter Ninnes and Prof. Warren Halloway, to name a few, were the senior UNE academic staff who were initially involved in the development of a trusting relationship between the UNE and the Ministry of Education and the Royal University of Bhutan. Some of the notable initiatives were basic education programmes within the goal of Education for All (1992), capacity building of teachers and educational leaders at UNE (1992), multigrade teaching (1993), research and consultancy (1997), In-service Education

and Training -INSET Project (1998-99), early childhood education (2008); and UNE student-teacher exchange programme (2016). A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed between the UNE and DoFPS in 2013 to promote research, capacity building and exchange program under the initiative of Dr Karl Vernes, Environment and Rural Sciences and Dr Rajanathan Rajaratnam, Geography and Planning, in collaboration with Dr Sangay Dorji and Dr Sangay from DoFPS. Under this MoU, UNE now takes students enrolled in one of its popular units (Himalayan Biogeography and Ecology) to Bhutan every year. MoU also benefitted several other scholars under MoAF mainly through collaborative research and publication with UNE faculty members. There is also the very successful New Colombo Plan Scholarships provided to UNE from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), which has seen 6 years of 20 scholarships available for Education students to engage in a short study program to Bhutan. This complements the Geology and ERS group who also have been awarded these scholarships across the last 5 years.

Over the years, UNE has enrolled numerous Bhutanese undergraduates and postgraduate students in the Faculty of Humanities Arts, Social Sciences and Education, (HASSE), Faculty of Medicine and Health and Faculty of Science, Agriculture, Business and Law. Currently, there are 12 postgraduate, three undergraduate students and one post-doctoral fellow at the UNE. Along with them, 21 children are studying in various public schools in Armidale. Today, Armidale is currently home to more than 50 Bhutanese.

It is also noteworthy that the Bhutanese graduates from the University of New England have been highly successful in their respective careers in Bhutan. Notable among them are the two former Vice-Chancellors of the Royal University of Bhutan, Dasho Zangley Drukpa and Dasho Pema Thinley, who also served as the Health Minister and the Education Secretary respectively. Both of the current Presidents of the two colleges of education, Dr Dorji Thinley and Dr Rinchen Dorji completed their PhD from the UNE. Numerous others are serving at the senior level in the Ministry of Education, the Royal University of Bhutan, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and several other organizations.

2. The rationale for the establishment of BSA in Armidale, NSW

Bhutanese in Armidale have been increasing over time and currently have reached a record high of 54, including family members. It is anticipated to increase in the near future. Given the increasing number of Bhutanese in Armidale, the BSA is formed to maintain solidarity, instil "Tha-Damtshi, Lay-Jumdrey" (Bhutanese value of loyalty to the King, County and People and the trust in karmic law of cause and effect) and promote welfare amongst Bhutanese. Furthermore, the BSA provides opportunities to represent Bhutan and showcase Bhutanese culture and traditions amongst other international communities in Armidale. More importantly, BSA plays a role in enhancing and sustaining the relationship between Bhutan and the University of New England and the Australian community.

3. Objectives of BSA

3.1. Organize events of national significance and importance to sustain and promote Bhutanese values, tradition and culture;

3.2. Promote interactions and solidarity amongst Bhutanese communities and friends of Bhutan through social gatherings including celebrations of national festivals;

3.3. Promote awareness about Bhutan by participating in events and festivals organized by the UNE and other agencies in Armidale and nearby regions;

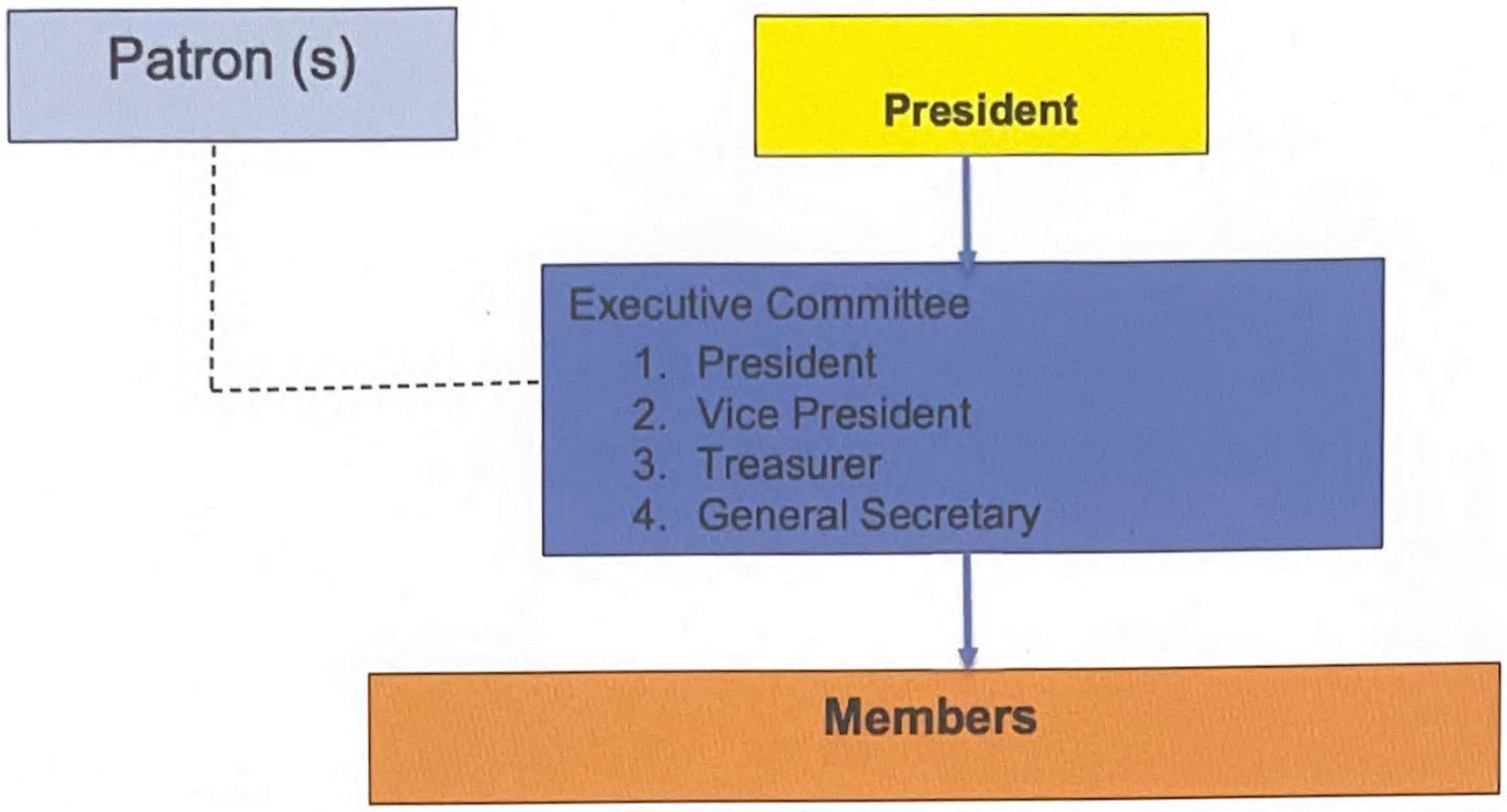
3.4. Provide information and guidance to Bhutanese students aspiring to study in Armidale;

3.5. Assist new students/members in finding accommodation, studies and addressing other issues such as emotional and mental distress;

3.6. Provide necessary support, including financial support to the members facing hardships;

3.7. Promote collaboration and networking between Bhutan and the University of New England.

4. Organisational Structure of BSA



5. Operational procedure of BSA

The BSA-Armidale comprises four main components; Patrons, President, Executive Committee (EC) and the Members. The Association shall function under the leadership of the President who will be supported by the Executive Committee Members. The Executive Committee shall seek advice and support of the Patrons as and when necessary. The President and Members of the Executive Committee shall be elected annually. General meetings of all the members shall be convened to seek overall direction, recommendations, the election of the President and Members of the Executive Committee. Executive Committee meetings shall serve as a platform for interactions amongst the executive committee members.

5.1 Patrons

One or two senior faculty / ex-faculty of the University of New England, with knowledge and connections with Bhutan and the Bhutanese students at the UNE shall be identified and requested by the BSA to serve as a Patron(s). A Patron (s) shall chiefly function as advisors and guides to the Association.

5.2 Executive Committee and the meeting

5.2.1 The Executive Committee shall consists of the President, Vice-President, General Secretary and Treasurer;

5.2.2 The members of the executive committee shall meet at least quarterly (4 times a year) to set the direction for the BSA, review and report BSA functions, respond to ad-hoc and unforeseen circumstances etc;

5.2.3 At least three of the four members, including either the President or Vice President must be present to convene a meeting;

5.2.4 In principle, the Committee shall start functioning from the day of the appointment until the new Executive Members are elected;

5.2.5 The Committee shall manage, organize and coordinate the functions and activities of the BSA as per the calendar of events endorsed by the BSA.

5.3 Specific Roles and Responsibilities of the Executive Committee Members

5.3.1 **President**

a) Presides all meetings of the BSA;
b) Calls special (ad hoc) meetings of the BSA;
c) Communicates with the BSA members on relevant matters;
d) Sends and receives correspondence from relevant agencies on behalf of the BSA;
e) Liaise with the University of New England (UNE), relevant Government agencies of Bhutan (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc.), Armidale community organisations, and other relevant stakeholders;
f) Maintains contact with the BSA patrons;
g) Provides encouragement and motivation to make sure members feel valued and connected to the BSA;
h) Represents the BSA at outside functions if necessary for the welfare of the BSA;
i) Acts as a co-signatory on the BSA account with the BSA treasurer.

5.3.2 **Vice- President**

a) Officiates for the President in his/her absence;
b) Assists the President directly in all matters related to BSA;

c) Schedules locations for meetings and events;

d) Communicates information and decisions of the Executive Committee to the BSA members.

5.3.3 **General Secretary**

a) Maintains a record of all activities of the BSA;

b) Keeps and distributes minutes of each meeting of the BSA to Members, Patrons and others as determined by the Executive Committee;

c) Creates and distributes agendas for each meeting of the BSA;

d) Notifies all BSA Members of meetings;

e) Prepares BSA's calendar of events;

f) Schedules and coordinates all activities of the BSA.

5.3.4 **Treasurer**

a) Prepares an annual budget plan for the annual calendar of events

b) Collects funds and deposits to the BSA account

c) Pays bills related to BSA activities

d) Maintains a record of all financial transactions

e) Prepares and submits financial reports to the BSA members biannually

f) Maintains a stock register of non-consumable goods of the BSA

g) Acts as a co-signatory to the BSA account with the BSA President

h). Countersigns on the book of accounts

5.4 General meeting

5.4.1 The general meetings shall be held bi-annually (First general meeting shall be held after the assumption of the office by the new Executive Committee and second shall be towards the end of the term of the incumbent Executive committee) with the quorum of at least 2/3rd of the Members.

5.4.2 The Executive Committee members of the BSA shall be nominated/elected during the general meeting (see 5.5 below)

5.4.3 Any issues, requiring changes to the BSA guidelines shall be discussed and endorsed during the general meeting

5.4.4 The decisions made at meetings shall be based on a simple majority of the members present (refer 5.4.1)

5.4.5 The President and the EC members shall present the BSA report of the past one year of their tenure during the second General Meeting.

5.4.6 An Ad hoc General Meeting may be called by the President during an emergency for the implementation of unforeseen and unplanned activities

5.5 Election of the President and the members of the EC

5.5.1 The new President and the members of the Executive Committee shall be elected annually during the second General Meeting.

5.5.2 The incumbent Executive Committee shall seek at least four nominations to take up the responsibility. The nomination should be submitted to serving the General Secretary at least three days prior to the scheduled General Meeting.

5.5.3 The election for the Executive Committee shall be carried out through a secret ballot.

5.5.4 The four candidates who receive maximum votes shall be declared as the new EC members.

5.5.5 The Position of the President, Vice-President, General Secretary and the Treasurer shall be decided by the numbers of votes received (highest for the President followed by Vice-President, General Secretary and Treasurer), or through the mutual consensus of the four elected members, in case of ties.

5.5.6 The details of the election shall be worked out by the incumbent EC members and presented to the General Meeting before the election.

5.5.7 BSA members of 18 and above years shall be eligible to cast their vote.

5.6 BSA Membership

5.6.1 The membership to BSA is open to all the Bhutanese in Armidale so long as he/she voluntarily agrees to work together to achieve the objectives of BSA and abide by terms and conditions stated in the following sections;

5.6.2 Members shall strive to attend meetings called by the Executive Committee;

5.6.3 Should the members feel the need to represent Bhutan in a bigger forum, the Executive Committee shall nominate representative in consultation with the BSA members, unless specified otherwise;

5.6.4 If the total members of the Association fall below three individuals, they shall jointly uphold the objectives of the Association, abiding by the terms and conditions.

5.7 Welfare Scheme

5.7.1 Collection of "semso" (financial support as gesture of solidarity) for the bereaved member shall be voluntary and shall not be paid from the BSA funds;

5.7.2 Members referred for medical treatment as in-patient (hospitalized) out of Armidale for more than three nights shall be provided with a maximum of AUD 500 from the BSA fund to support his/her medical expenses.

5.8 **Finance**

5.8.1 A minimum annual membership fee shall be collected from the Member (both adults and children) as seed fund for the organization. The fee amount shall be decided during the first general meeting (GM);

5.8.2 BSA may organize fund raising events to supplement core fund raised through membership and based on the need and relevance of such events;

5.8.3 Member shall have full access to the Association's accounts for any reconciliation or auditing, after making a written application to the President and with five days advance notice;

5.8.4 BSA funds shall not be used to organize activities outside the scope of BSA

5.8.5 All decisions regarding the BSA finances shall be made in consultation with the Members. A simple majority of two-thirds is required to make the decision;

5.8.6 The Executive Committee shall be responsible to ensure transparency and accountability of the BSA funds.

5.9 Amendment of the BSA Operational Guideline

5.9.1 Any member of the Association has the right to propose changes to BSA Operational Guideline;

5.9.2 Changes to the Operational Guideline shall be made upon agreement by a two-thirds majority of BSA members during the General Meeting

5.10 Documentation

5.10.1 The Executive Members shall maintain and preserve all the documents for their tenure, starting from the date of their term and hand over to the next Executive members at the end of the tenure.

Endorsement

This document in the current form was endorsed on 9 October 2020 through virtual voting with 22 "YES" votes from 31 eligible voters of BSA, Armidale.