



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting  
Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023 on campus and via MS Teams**

**Present:**

- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Oluronke Oluwalere (OO)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Manoj Kumar Nagireddy (MKN)
- Md Sajal (MS)
- Padmavathi Valluri (PV)
- Chinmay Vyas (CV)
- Bob Walder (BH)
- Professor Mairi Watson (MW)

**In attendance:**

- Lucy Atkinson, *incoming External Trustee* (LA)
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Sean Ferrie, *Head of Operations, HSU* (SFe)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)

**1. Apologies for absence**

Sarah Fuell

**Non-Attendance**

None

**Welcome**

BW welcomed everyone to the meeting, his first as Chair. He said he was looking forward to working with everyone over the course of the academic year.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

None noted.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

#### 4. CEO Update

The Board received the update from the CEO. RH highlighted the following:

- Auto-enrolment in Academic Societies. RH highlighted the progress made to auto-enrol approximately 13k students into a selected range of Academic Societies. Programmes have been selected strategically, depending on where performance in the NSS or engagement with HSU might be low, and on the feedback from SCOs. HB reported on her involvement in the project. She said that the research undertaken had indicated that there is considerable engagement by students in their first year but that this drops significantly in their second and third years, which mirrors drop-out rates from courses. She noted that Academic Societies provide a means to not only offer extension and enrichment opportunities but to also offer investment and motivation to those students who are in need of more support. HB went on to say that the recruitment of committee members is also currently underway, as is planning for events for some Schools through collaboration with Programme Leaders and SCOs etc.
- Final Strategic Plan 2023-2026. RH directed Trustees to the final version of the Plan, circulated with the papers for today's meeting.
- Teaching Excellence Framework. The OFS has now released the final grading for universities, with 23% of results still pending due to appeal. UH have reverted to the OFS to review their submission, considering that some of the information submitted was taken out of context or perhaps not assessed / interpreted as expected. The appeal decision should be received around Christmas.

#### 5. Community Survey

The Board received a presentation on the Community Survey. SO took Trustees through this research, undertaken during the latter part of Semester B this year. The survey examined how students felt about the university community around them and the barriers they may face. The following themes were examined: Cost of Living, Part-Time Jobs, Communication, Extracurricular Activities, Commitments and Campus Areas.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- MW asked if data was available as to the distribution of students that are working per academic year, as this could significantly affect studies and ultimately feed into UH's decision-making. SO said that this could certainly be explored.
- UM asked if data was available as to what sector ie retail, hospitality etc students are working in. SO said this had not been asked specifically. RH noted that amongst the international student community particularly, working hours were likely to have been under reported due to the cap on the number of hours students can work. MW said that there would be merit in also exploring this in order to further inform the student experience.
- OO queried the high number of students expressing a sense of loneliness daily. BW went on to ask if this had risen post-Covid. SO said he would double-check the exact figures, but that the latest research undertaken indicated a continuation of high numbers in this area. He went on to say how important it is that students can access the resources they need, and RH agreed, noting that the building of academic societies, in effect 'communities within a community', is paramount in helping students to feel a sense of belonging.
- In response to MS, SO said that the key driver in accommodation requirements for international students was the cost of accommodation, followed by prioritisation of

quality. MKN noted that he has been lobbied by students troubled by the cost of living currently.

- MKN went on to note that many international students were not familiar with email. SO replied that prioritisation of face-to-face communications to eliminate the need for email is active.

## **6. Start of Term update and Schools-based working approach**

The Board received a report on the start of Term activities.

SFe highlighted that the team staged 22 events over 24 days, spread across both campuses with 8k students attend. Focus was on enjoyment, safety and helping students to understand the role of HSU. Events included cultural events such as One World Day and Global Lounge, a Colour Run, an off-site to Oxford and outdoor cinema, and SFe highlighted the success of International Arrivals Weekend and the de Havilland campus Welcome Fair. He noted the increase in branding awareness, not only through artwork but also across clothing, 'freebies' etc, as well as the introduction of hand-held scanners and feedback kiosks, which provided useful data on the student demographic. Eight consecutive nights ran in the Forum with 6k students attending, down on last year. Individual ticket sales were up against budget, but wristband sales were down. Bar income was up, as was spend per head on Term B last year. He thanked the team for their commitment and hard work over the period.

SFe went on to note that there are currently 88 active Societies. He also noted, as discussed earlier, the auto-enrolment programme and training underway for Academic Societies.

Finally, SFe highlighted the Schools-based working approach and project for Term A. Introductory meetings with Schools have already taken place to begin to build collaborative relationships.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- MW congratulated the team on the fantastic programme delivered and the step up in terms of student engagement. MKN concurred and said he had received very positive feedback, thanking the team for their great efforts.
- In response to CV, SO noted that the team are working with SCOs to find students who want to take on additional responsibility to lead those Societies that are currently without committees. Events continue to be run for these Societies.
- In response to HB, SFe said that the team are taking requests in respect of new and additional events and are always happy to support students in putting on their own events. He suggested that he and HB discuss further offline.

## **7. Elected Officer update**

The Board received the update paper from the Elected Officer team.

BW said that, as this is a new team and a new format to the report, any suggestions or recommendations for improvement would be well-received.

RH said that the energy, efforts and presence of the Elected Officer team have been remarkable so early in the tenure of their roles. She thanked the team, on behalf of the Board, for their

commitment and contribution. BW concurred, noting the impressive start the Officer team had made to the academic year.

## **8. University update**

MW updated the Board on the current opportunities and challenges facing UH:

- Registration and Start of Term. UH have registered 11,209 of 12,546 new students, and almost 11k of almost 12k returning students. From a UH perspective, this has been a very positive start to term, save for issues concerning buses and parking, in part exacerbated by the incident at Luton Airport earlier in the week. UH is trying to encourage staff and students to use the Park and Ride service as much as possible. MW noted that the way UH had arranged the organisational aspects of the start of term had had a very positive impact and she thanked RH for her pivotal role in this.
- Teaching Excellence Framework. MW highlighted the context of other awards ie UH was second in the UH in the PTES and first in the East of England and twenty-sixth in the UK for the NSS. Ofsted have reported positively on UH's apprenticeship provision. As discussed earlier, she noted that UH are confident about the review of the TEF outcome.
- Open Day. The next Undergraduate Open Day is scheduled for Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> October 2023, with welcome talks taking place at both College Lane and de Havilland campuses.
- Freedom of Speech legislation. UH is working through what this will mean for the university while awaiting guidance from the OFS.
- Working in partnership with students. MW noted that two items which feature in the Education and Student Experience Strand Plan are 1) working in partnership with students in everything UH does and 2) establishing a culture where students are actively included in decision making, feeling empowered to contribute and trusting UH to act. She said this sets up the relationship for the remainder of the academic year, in maintaining a vibrant university community. She went on to say that focus this year should revolve around what the campuses and community should look and feel like, to create a sense of belonging for all students. MW also highlighted that student representation is present this year at every decision-making forum within the university.
- Hardship funding. £1m is available this year in funding for students in need.

## **9. Finance**

The Board received the end of year accounts. LP highlighted the following:

- The year ended on a surplus of £22,418.
- Investment was made last year in staff training to encourage dynamic and collaborative working, in Kickstarter projects, such as the Wellbeing project inviting International students to collect a pack of toiletries and hygiene products, and in branding.
- Salary savings were made through the vacancy for the role President in the 2022/23 academic year and in a Research Manager position which went unfilled for the year.
- Commercial made a surplus in the year of approximately £53k, which was under budget as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, whereby students are not socialising or spending as much. A salary saving through a vacant position in the team also contributed to the surplus.
- All departments underspent.
- UH received a revenue share of £6.5k approximately in respect of the Forum.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RH confirmed that the surplus will go into Reserves.
- RH said that a new firm of auditors, Godfrey Wilson, will present the Audit Report at the next Board Meeting in November. Godfrey Wilson were chosen after a competitive tender process and are very experienced in the sector. RH said she would be pleased for any feedback on their presentation.

**10. Matters for approval**

Bye-Law 3 – Elected Officers and Memorandum and Articles of Association

BW drew the Board’s attention to Papers 5a-5c in respect of the summary of governance changes required to the Memorandum and Articles of Association to reflect recent changes to the Elected Officer structure. Trustees approved the change of wording.

Appointment of Deputy Chair

OO nominated MKN for the role, seconded by UM. Trustees approved the appointment of MKN as Deputy Chair.

Appointment of Student Governor

Trustees noted the appointment of MKN as Student Governor.

Appointment of Chair - People Committee and Appointment of Chair - Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Trustees noted the appointment of UM as Chair of the People Committee. It was also noted that the Committee requires a further External Trustee to be appointed.

SF is currently Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee which she will hold until her External Trustee tenure concludes in February 2024. A successor is required.

BW and RH will follow up with current and incoming External Trustees to ensure both Committees meet minimum membership requirements.

BW/RH

**11. HSU Risk Register October 2023**

The Board received the latest iteration of the Risk Register. A fuller discussion in respect of the Register will take place at the next meeting of the Board in November. RH noted that UM is running a risk workshop for SLT in the coming days and thanked him for this valuable input.

**12. HSU Annual Health and Safety Report 2022-23**

The Board received the Annual Health and Safety Assurance Report.

**13. AOB**

HB said that she had been approached by students wishing to express their views in respect of the Israel / Palestine conflict. She asked for advice. UM asked if the Government had issued any guidance to universities, but RH said that this was not the case. She noted that this was an incredibly emotive issue for many and there is no wish to stifle opinion, but that messaging had gone out from both UH and HSU to sensitively remind students about what support is available and how to avoid behaviour that might stray into bullying and harassment. She suggested that the best way forward was for HB to write to RH to facilitate a conversation with the Dean of Students to seek advice. BW thanked HB for raising this important issue and he asked RH and HB to report back at the next meeting of the Board in November.

RH/HB

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

**Next Meeting: Tuesday, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 4.00 pm (venue tbc)**

*Dates for 2023/24 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm:*

*Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024*  
*Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024*  
*Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024*  
*Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024*