



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, 18th September 2020 via MS Teams

Present:

- Maryam Ateeq (MA)
- David Ball (DB)
- Karthik Kumar Bonkur (KB)
- Sarah Fuell (SF)
- Stephen Isaacs (SI)
- Bobbie Jay (BJ)
- Kayleigh Malone (KM)
- Simon Petar (SP)
- Saad Raees (SR)
- Bishal Saha (BS)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Luke Delderfield, *Head of Operations, HSU* (LD)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Leena Patel, *Head of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary* (KMCK)

1. Apologies for absence

None

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome and Introductions

DB introduced himself as Chair of the Board for the next academic year and welcomed all new and continuing Trustees to the meeting. He introduced members of the HSU Senior Management Team joining the meeting for discussions today. He also highlighted the virtual breakout sessions within the meeting for introductions amongst Trustees.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Year-end Accounts and 2020-21 Budget Update (Paper 1)

RH took the Board through the Year-end Accounts. She noted that although the accounts have been finalised and audited, the audit report has not yet been received and thus figures are still in draft. The full audit report will be tabled at the next meeting of the Board and early indications are that the audit has gone well. However, RH noted that, in line with other SUs, auditors are interrogating organisations very fully at present. She highlighted that she had been asked to indicate whether HSU was a 'going concern' and to provide in-depth information on the pension liability position.

She highlighted the following:

- A £118k surplus for the year, against budget of £6k. The significant difference is due to the impact and timing of Covid. Historically, HSU has generated a large amount of income through Autumn of each year with spending concentrated into the second half of the year. The rapid shutdown due to the pandemic from Spring 2020 and the significantly reduced spend, allied to the furlough of 5 members of staff, has led to significantly reduced costs and thus surplus. The surplus is a significant turnaround from the £170k deficit position in recent years.
- HSU is predicting that it will be in a loss-making position this year, with an expected deficit at the end of 2020/21 of £45k. RH confirmed SF's understanding that this loss is largely a result of costs relating to staff and the lack of the commercial activity which would bring in profits to offset that. SF further said that the loss of £45k is actually considerably less than the loss would have been had HSU not focused so closely on its cost initiatives in recent years. RH went on to note that the deficit has been raised at UH's Audit and Risk Committee in June so UH is aware of the position.
- The budget has not yet been finalised by UH; sign-off will be by the Board of Governors in October. However, the first of three lump sums of the subvention grant has been received ie last year's grant + 1%. SP asked if there had been any insight as to whether a revision may be requested by UH and how HSU may respond. RH replied that although there had been no indications to date coming out of UH, there were a couple of 'levers' HSU could engage if necessary, for example staff wage increases have been deferred until April which staff are aware of. RH concluded by saying that as soon as the budget is confirmed by UH she will update the Board.
- Zero income has been budgeted for the Forum. Curtailment of student staff has occurred while the Forum remains shut.
- Colleagues are returning from furlough in November and they will be redeployed where possible. DB said he had been very impressed with the management of the staff who are on furlough and the efforts that had been made to avoid redundancy. He noted his thanks to RH and LP for this excellent effort.

4. HSU End of Year Wrap-Up

The Board received SO's presentation looking back at the 2019/20 academic year. He took Trustees through research into current engagement with HSU for Student Reps, Societies, SCOs, Elections and Advice and Support for the year 2018/19.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB noted, amid the data, that the number of female students at the level of SCO appears

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not to be coming through to the number of female students that then go on to stand for leadership roles.

- SI said that he had noted that some of the identifiers had changed year on year. SO replied, for example, that HSU had only received 'ethnicity' data from UH this year so the comparison is not direct but the best available.
- RH noted that this data feeds into KPIs, particularly the Board-level KPI centred on the engagement of the student population, as well as departmental-level KPIs that ensure that HSU's events and activities align with the student demographic.

MW left the meeting at 3.00 pm.

5. Covid-19 Student Feedback (Paper 2)

The Board received the Covid-19 Student Experience report and RH took Trustees through the data on the negative financial impact for students, Health and Safety, the mental health impact and differences in student experience across schools. She said that the report had been extremely useful in supporting the Elected Officers in their advocacy of students' views. Furthermore, she noted that the UH had taken on board many of the recommendations, largely in part to the Elected Officer team of 2019/20 advocating on many of these issues as well as the new team who have continued this work.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB said that he was impressed with the work that gone into the report and the level of detail feeding into the recommendations which in turn were a good consolidation of so much information. He went on to say that some of the data was predictable, other less so.
- In response to SI, RH confirmed that masks have now been made available to all students.

6. Return to the Office Update

The Board received the Return to the Office Update and LP took Trustees through the guiding principles, logistics, hybrid working pattern and the impact on the start of term.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB thanked LP for the comprehensive update and noted the level of detail and planning that has gone into making the spaces 'Covid-safe'.
- LP highlighted that no ad hoc visitors are being accepted to campus currently with everything bookable in advance. She also noted that the SMT meet weekly to keep the situation under review given the changing nature of the national picture.
- RH said that HSU very much takes its lead from UH as to working on campus, following UH's progression through the Tiers of 'lockdown' set for the Higher Education sector. Currently, Tier 1 is operating which is a hybrid of online and face to face.

MW re-joined the meeting at 3.40 pm.

7. UH Start of Term Update

MW gave a verbal update to the Board on the start of term for the new academic year. She highlighted the following:

- The many positive aspects to the current situation, namely the pulling together of multiple points of community to make a difference to those who have suffered most during the pandemic. MW particularly highlighted the excellent work that HSU had undertaken in the assistance offered to support students who could not return home initially and the work on gathering student feedback on areas of concern which has allowed UH to be responsive on issues such as digital poverty and access to safe spaces to study. She noted she had been very impressed with the work HSU have done in holding the student community together even when it had proved very difficult to do so.
- The huge task ahead this semester and in the lifetime of the Strategic Plan, particularly surrounding the challenges of the A-level results and the student registration process. She highlighted the new norm of 'blended' learning and the need to bring along staff skills and student expectations to reflect positively on this experience.
- The instigation of a weekly staff Q&A and an Education and Student Experience Planning Group working alongside the UH business continuity mechanisms that plan for the start of term. She also highlighted the PVC Student Advisory Group, noting it would be very beneficial if one of the Elected Officers could join this forum.
- The launch of the BAME Institutional Action Plan although she noted that the terminology is deeply problematic. Feeding into the Access and Participation Plan, this will drive funding to UH for those students who are least well represented and have the most challenges in engaging with university study. Every member of UH staff has this year an appraisal objective related to the Institutional Action Plan.
- Black History Month will raise the profile of UH's goals of equalising the field for all students.
- UH continues to contingency plan for if and when the campus closes again in respect of Covid-19, around the four Tiers for the Higher Education sector.
- MW closed by noting the excellent, growing relationships between UH and HSU.

8. HSU Start of Term Update

The Board received a presentation from LD and SO on the start of term in respect of HSU activities and Freshers' Month. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- SI asked if it had been made clear that the gesture of free membership of societies, discussed and approved previously, would not be repeated in future years. LD said that it had been made very clear that subscriptions this year had been waived because of the current situation where students cannot undertake activities face to face. The plan is for subscriptions to recommence in 2021 if possible. SF pointed out that, from a budgeting perspective, this initiative has not cost anything in effect as it is a goodwill gesture to students using the significant amount of money previously allocated to societies and budgeted for that had not been taken up.
- MW highlighted the importance of the work being undertaken on the BAME Awarding Gap educational survey within the BAME Student Journey research.
- DB thanked LD and SO for their very comprehensive review.

9. Sabbatical Team Priority Campaign / Update (Paper 3)

The Sabbatical Team presented the 2020/21 HSU Priority Campaign reporting on their priorities and targets for the coming year. The team has decided to focus its efforts on advocating for student success at UH through the pandemic. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- SP thanked the team for the presentation and said he was looking forward to their plans coming to fruition.

SI re-joined the meeting at 4.35 pm.

- SP went on to ask what morale was like amongst students and staff. MW responded initially, noting that staff were going into the challenges of the new term without necessarily feeling rested or ready after the tumultuous first half of the year. However, she noted the wonderful sense of positivity amongst staff and how collegiate and collaborative staff are; the attitude can be summarised as 'how can we do this?' rather than 'we can't do this'. She said she was still hearing a willingness to support students and to be ready for their return despite the incredible challenges. She noted that there were some staff who had concerns for their own wellbeing and how this might impact on students, and some concern surrounding general levels of compliance to rules by students. She thanked HSU for all their efforts in creating a new and exciting Freshers' Month. MW also acknowledged the difficulties surrounding the registration process currently. KM said that from a student perspective morale amongst students was mixed, some nervous, some excited.
- In response to SF, MW noted that the overall number of students enrolling this year is largely constant at approximately 22k across all levels. There are, however, far fewer students in accommodation this year, down by about 700 on campus with students either electing to stay at home or to stay in private accommodation. Some programmes have overrecruited significantly because of the change in the A-level results process; some have underrecruited where some students have 'traded up' to other universities.

10. CEO Update (Paper 4)

The Board received the CEO's report (Paper 4). Trustees were asked to note the KPIs that had previously been discussed and agreed during the planning round with UH. RH highlighted the grouping of the KPIs by Strategic Theme so that it is easier to see how strategy is playing out in operational terms.

11. Matters to vote on

Remunerations and Appointments Committee (Paper 5)

The Board received the Terms of Reference (Paper 5) for the Remunerations and Appointments Committee. DB noted the requirement for a further Sabbatical member and a further Student member to join the Committee. As BJ and SR both expressed an interest to join the Committee, the Board approved their dual membership with the details of the duration of their service to be confirmed.

The Board received the Terms of Reference (Paper 6) for the Finance and Audit Committee. DB noted the need for a further Sabbatical member to join the Committee. KM nominated herself to join and this was approved by the Board.

12. AOB

RH said that each academic year the Sabbatical Officers are paired with an External Trustee for mentoring sessions and she stressed the beneficial nature of these relationships. She suggested that this year the pairings be: KB/DB, KM/SF, BJ/SI, SR/SP and MA/RH. The first mentoring sessions will be arranged imminently.

Meeting closed at 5.00 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 28th October 2020 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm (to include Audit Report and final Year End Accounts from Hillier Hopkins)

Dates for academic year 2020/2021:

Wednesday, 25th November 2020 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 24th February 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 5th May 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 23rd June 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm