



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 20th June 2024 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Chizobam Ezechukwu (CE)
- Akinyemi Lawal (AL)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Moyinoluwa Olaiya (MO)
- Oluronke Oluwalere (OO)
- Bob Walder (BW)
- Professor Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Rohit Mahadevu, *President Elect, HSU* (RM)
- Maria McCaffrey, *Finance Manager, HSU* (MM)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)

1. Apologies for absence

- Dr Lucy Atkinson
- Sean Ferrie
- Divya Maheshwaram
- Manoj Kumar Nagireddy
- Rajiv Sudan

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome

BW welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced RM, incoming President, HSU, 2024-25.

2. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Thursday, 21st March 2024.

4. CEO Update

The Board received the CEO Update. RH highlighted the following:

- End of year update – engagement. Approximately 70% of the UH population have engaged with HSU services this academic year, against a 100% target, which represents huge growth. This has been driven by the auto-enrolment to academic societies and the events provision. There has been a noted change in the demographic of users with a marked increase in the number of Undergraduate and Home students using services. Engagement varies by School from 100% of students from Creative Arts versus only 36% of students from the Business School, important to bear in mind however that this School has over 10k students. RH said that these Schools were areas of focus along with the School of Life and Medical Sciences which also has lower engagement. In response to MW, RH said that these Schools appeared to have lower engagement levels primarily due to HSU’s focus on the postgraduate experience, along with HSU’s deliberate choice not to target as many societies in these Schools for auto-enrolment, with the initiative focused elsewhere.

5. Herts Listening Project

The Board received a presentation on the Herts Listening Project, which aims to capture insights from first-year undergraduate students through the academic year, via face to face conversations and pulse-style questions. The project aims to understand students' expectations, concerns, and barriers, with the goal of shaping future inductions and addressing issues in real-time where possible. Nearly all of the project's budget will be invested in student wages, ensuring that the initiative directly benefits the student community. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- UM asked what considerations had been made about GDPR and data privacy. RH replied that HSU works to a wider GDPR policy, alongside UH’s well-established ethics process that is followed with any Insight projects. UM went on to ask if a Data Protection Impact Assessment had been undertaken. RH said she would revert with further details on this once the project is underway.

6. General Elections Communications

The Board received a presentation on General Elections Communications from HB and RM whereby HSU is working with Marcomms to promote voter registration among students. The aim is to educate them on eligibility to vote, registration protocol, and the importance of registering for postal votes if required. HSU is partnering with Wonkhe to highlight key manifesto points across major parties relevant to students, encouraging informed voting decisions and reminding students they can vote at home (for those resident in the UK) or in Welwyn Hatfield if they will be here on 4th July. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- BW said how important this project was and he was delighted that student participation was being maximised.
- RH expressed her thanks to HB and RM, particularly given that the date of the General Election was brought forward to July from the autumn. She thanked them wholeheartedly for mobilising so quickly to the change in national plans.

7. Peer Mentoring Pilot

The Board received a presentation on the Peer Mentoring Pilot Scheme. This aims to provide targeted support for first-year undergraduate students in Creative Arts and Law programmes, helping them to successfully transition into university life – and with an overall goal of improving retention rates. The scheme seeks to foster a sense of belonging, enhance student engagement, and promote academic success by connecting new students with experienced peer mentors who can offer guidance, support and a shared understanding of the challenges faced by first-year students. As this is a pilot programme, it is hoped that lessons learned can be utilised to roll the scheme out more widely as an Access and Participation Plan Intervention from 2025.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- BW said he felt it was important to fully support the mentors who may become the focus for others' problems. RH agreed wholeheartedly and said there was always room to adapt the programme if necessary to ensure sufficient support.

8. University update

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

- Vice-Chancellor. The VC has announced his retirement, to leave UH in summer 2025. The recruitment process commences in the autumn, with a student panel involved in the selection, and stakeholder interviews taking place at the end of November.
- National Student Survey. This is due to be published on 10th July 2024. The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Experience, is on annual leave during this period so MW will be leading on analysis and briefings. She noted that the response rate was very good this year and she was optimistic this would correlate to positive outcomes.
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. The survey period has closed now with a 37.1% response rate, compared to 24% last year. She thanked the Officer team for the role they played in making sure that students were engaged.
- Graduate Outcomes survey. UH has improved its position by ten places from 82nd to 72nd, and second in their competitor set.
- Non-continuation and retention. This is an area of focus for UH and thus MW said she was very pleased to see some of the initiatives HSU are working on currently which will doubtless play into performance on retention. UH compares well across the sector and in many areas is better. However, non-continuation from Year 1 to Year 2 is too high in some Schools, partly as a result of students' motivation and their experience. The Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education and Student Experience is leading on this.
- UH Finances. UH is in a financially very strong position with turnover in excess of £400m. Within that sits a surplus of around £23m or 5% of turnover. In normal years, the aim is for a 3% surplus but because the external context is so uncertain, this increased surplus gives UH some 'cushion' from the political environment. She noted that it is probable that there will be a change of Government imminently and no political party has an easy solution to the challenges of balancing international recruitment and the negative rhetoric around migration. Next year's forecast is a £440m turnover, returning to a 3% surplus. She noted that the Board should have every confidence in the future of the university.
- Medical School. The opening of the Medical School has been brought forward from 2027 to 2026. Other areas of the university are being examined where the portfolio might be built beyond the current curriculum and Schools.

- Graduation ceremonies. These will take place again in September at St Albans Abbey. Different arrangements will be in place because UH were not made aware that the university had breached planning permission to put marquees on the Abbey grounds because there were also February graduations at the Abbey ie only ten days a year are permissible to have temporary structures in place. In September, there will be much bigger pre-ceremony celebrations on campus. MW said that she hoped this would answer some of the concerns from students that families have, until now, been unable to see campus and where students have studied.
- Start of term and induction. Induction processes are being reworked. MW said UH are expecting to welcome slightly fewer international students this September, potentially 5-10% less, against a sector prediction of around 50% less.
- New Officer team. MW said she was very much looking forward to working with the new President and Elected Officers, anticipating another productive year of substantial impact. She noted that new Officers always ensure there is no complacency through their ability to see things afresh.

BW thanked MW for her, as always, interesting and valuable update. He highlighted the most impressive and collaborative relationship between UH and HSU.

9. May 2024 Management Accounts

The Board received the May Management Accounts. LP highlighted the following:

- A number of intern positions have been created for the summer period.
- Enterprises forecasted a loss but private hire events have been booked for June / July so this position may change.
- All departments are underspending. There is a vacancy maternity cover in one department and the savings have gone into creating student staff jobs in the Advice and Support Centre.
- The VAT review, being discussed at today's meeting, and vacancies recruited through agency have increased costs.
- RH noted that the end of year celebration moved into the venue this year with a lower ticket price for students. This resulted in a positive uptake and high bar sales. She noted the cost-effective nature of the event compared to previous years.
- UM asked for feedback on the Central Management line of the February Management Accounts where there appeared to be a discrepancy, as noted at the last meeting. RH said this was discussed at the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Maria McCaffrey joined the meeting at 5.00 pm.

10. VAT Review Recommendation

The Board received a briefing paper following a VAT review, coming out of this year's Audit, undertaken by Crowe UK LLP that took place in June 2024. MM briefed Trustees that currently HSU and Enterprises are separately VAT registered but now that HSU are incorporated, it is possible to create one VAT entity instead of two. VAT Grouping is essentially a new VAT registration with a new number. The Advisors recommend that a VAT Group is created from 1st August 2024 (the start of the next Accounting and VAT/Tax Year). She highlighted the pros and cons of a potential change but noted that overall, it is a low risk intervention. LP noted that others in the sector have

introduced this measure, and that, in essence, it will be an administration exercise to notify of the change in VAT number.

The Board unanimously approved the review recommendation.

Maria McCaffrey left the meeting at 5.15 pm.

11. Sabbatical Officer Update

The Board received the update paper from the Elected Officer team. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RH said the report was compiled by the Placement Student who supports the Officer team in their work and covers the full year for each and every Officer. She highlighted what an impressive body of work was represented and how well it speaks to the new system of Elected Officers. She went on to say that issues are now being raised in 'real time', as they occur, because the majority of Officers' time is now spent with other students which allows UH to, in turn, respond faster. Officer output is therefore broader and able to be both proactive and reactive. LP reminded Trustees that the Officer team work part-time which makes their considerable output even more remarkable.
- MW said that, in her view, this was a fantastic list of achievements but it should be remembered that it probably does not capture absolutely all that the Officer team had achieved. She went on to say that when this is overlaid with the in excess of 50 items that were raised and resolved at the PVC Student Advisory Group, this amounts to substantial and enduring changes and initiatives. MW also offered RH her congratulations on the development of the Officers which has enabled them to argue constructively and confidently in favour of such projects.
- BW noted that there was a challenge in the best way to present the outcomes and issues to capture fully everything that has been achieved.
- In response to MW, RH confirmed that the HSU Community Events team had been announced as winners of the Vice-Chancellor's Awards Team of the Year for 2024. The creation of this team had largely come about from Officer feedback and proves what a substantial effect the Officer team can have. She said that she was immensely proud of the team who had organised over 350 events this academic year.

12. People Committee and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Updates

- UM advised that recruitment is still ongoing for a Director of Advocacy and Operations, with interviews in this next round taking place in early July. RH noted that it is imperative to get the right fit for the role.
- UM further advised that one Student Trustee has been appointed for the new academic year. In addition, the team are exploring an approach to SCOs to fill the other vacancy. HB has very kindly offered to act as a mentor to the Student Trustees.
- RH reported that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee have agreed to invite representation from the Trustee of the Administrator for the Pension Scheme to come to a Board meeting in the new academic year in order to provide an update on the position of the Scheme.

- RH went on to say that the Risk Register will now look to incorporate opportunities for development / growth etc as well as risks. Sean Ferrie will be leading.

13. AOB

RH offered her sincerest thanks to AL and CE for their participation and contributions, and to OO for her unwavering commitment and most thoughtful contributions over the course of the year.

Meeting closed at 5.30 pm.

Next Meeting: *Dates for 2024/25 academic year – tbc*