



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 23rd February 2022 via MS Teams

Present:

- David Ball (DB)
- Rhiannon Ellis (RE)
- Sarah Fuell (SF)
- Prosasti Ganguly (PG)
- Zara Haram Syeda, (ZHS)
- Stephen Isaacs (SI)
- Katie Morton (KM)
- Simon Petar (SP)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Alun Minifey, *Head of Operations, HSU* (AM)
- 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

- Junaid Ahmed
- Victoria Udeh

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome

RE took the Chair and welcomed all Trustees to the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the last meeting which was held on Wednesday, 24th November 2021 at 4.00 pm.

Signed Dated

4. January 2022 Management Accounts

The Board received the January 2022 Management Accounts. RH highlighted the following:

- The Forum is trading very positively but a slowdown in trading has occurred since January 2022 which is continuing. This is normal for this time of year but because the Forum is a new space, the Operations team are continuing to monitor performance and making any necessary adjustments. Surplus of approximately £100k had been forecasted but this will be downgraded slightly, although remain strongly above budget. The adjustment to the forecast should settle at around £70k in profit. The Finance and Audit Committee agreed that this amount and any allocation will be further discussed at the next meeting to be held in April and recommendations will then be presented to the Board. DB reminded the Board that some of last year's surplus was spent on the Buddy Scheme and associated technology. RH noted that this year's financial position will allow for a larger-scale spend. In response to RE, RH said that any spend from the surplus would have to be used by the end of the financial year in July.
- RH went on to say that the Board will also need to consider the Reserves position as HSU is currently holding 2.5 times the amount recommended in the Reserves Policy.
- Other departments are underspending in the form of staff wages with a vacancy in the Student Voice department and a further vacancy to follow in the Elected Officer team. These will be reflected in the forecast as underspend.
- DB asked if this year's Summer Ball had been budgeted for. RH replied that this was fully incorporated within this year's budget. Expectation is that the cost of production for the event itself will be fully covered by ticket sales and therefore, bar sales are surplus.

MW joined the meeting at 4.20 pm.

5. CEO Update and Notice of Elections

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

- Diverse Adversities, BAME student journey project. HSU presented its finding on this project at a recent Wonkhe Conference attended by 500+ higher education professionals. This was very well received with separate approaches from several SUs asking for more information as to how the research was conducted and HSU's student voice approach. RH said this was a good opportunity to reflect on the successful progress HSU has made in recent years in foregrounding its non-commercial activity and in beginning to build a reputation in the sector as being truly excellent in this space. ZHS, who was part of the presenting team, also noted how well the project and research were received by delegates at the conference.
- Student societies. Year-on-year social activity enrolments are down year to date which is in line with the national picture. Action is being taken to drive additional engagements. RH noted that there is a shortfall of bed space on campus so many students are physically not on site, allied to a fall in student confidence more generally. Societies are student-led so there are challenges here surrounding the legacy of strong committees and in passing down student knowledge year-on-year.
- Elections. HSU elections are now underway with nominations now closed. Eligibility checks are currently being undertaken and voting will open on 1st March 2022, closing on 2nd March 2022. DB noted that the first part of the new Election process structure has now been introduced with HSU Elections being held prior to Exam Boards meeting. This allows

students to have studied at the university for a minimum of six months, or one term, prior to election, and is particularly relevant for the January intake of post-graduate students who will be eligible the following year. RH said this new process has been introduced successfully and the new structure was beginning to 'bed-in'. RH highlighted that City University has now taken a very similar path to HSU in the election of their Sabbatical Officers by removing portfolio and adopting a more adaptable approach. She said it was good to see others in the sector considering similar options to HSU.

- VP Education resignation. The VP Education has tendered her resignation having been offered a role within UH's Student Finance team. The VP Education was personally congratulated on her appointment by UH's Finance Director at a recent meeting. Given the lateness of the term, the role will remain vacant until July and her work will be shared amongst the other Officers and staff team. SP congratulated ZSH on her new role but suggested there may be some necessity for HSU to consider more fully staff retention. RH agreed and suggested this should be discussed at the upcoming Remuneration and Appointments' Committee. DB also offered his congratulations and he agreed that the Committee should discuss this at their next meeting when perhaps suggestions could be put forward in respect of start dates being mutually beneficial. RH said that HSU is always proud that their staff are recruited by UH to make such a positive contribution to the UH community but noted that HSU do invest significant resources into training and development of their staff.

RH/DB

LP and AM joined the meeting at 4.30 pm.

6. Sabbatical Officer report

The Board received the latest Sabbatical Officer report. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- Uno buses. In response to SF, PG said that the issues surrounding some of the UNO bus drivers centred on their lack of customer service, particularly sometimes towards those students for whom English is not their first language. It has been suggested that drivers could wear name badges which would make them more accountable but many drivers are resistant to this proposal. RH said that PG had been lobbying hard with the Managing Director of Uno (which is owned by UH but devolved from the university's management structure with UH's Finance Director on its Board) to improve customer service and the company have asked students to report any problems by quoting the timing and number of the bus involved. SF said that while she empathised with drivers not wanting to have name badges in this sometimes difficult social age, a 'middle ground' needed to be found to make this work. MW suggested that introducing a badge with a number for drivers might prove to be a workaround as it would not directly identify the individual. This would also allow the driver's identity to be confirmed in the case of an emergency. DB asked PG to bring an update on this situation back to the Board at the June meeting.
- Herts Empowerment. In response to KM, PG replied that Herts Empowerment was relaunched in Semester A and is now online, and offline where complaint boxes are placed on each campus and complaints followed up accordingly.
- SCO bursary. ZHS noted that she had asked UH to increase the bursary for the training of SCOs given the important level of feedback they can provide. DB suggested that this should be discussed further at the next meeting of the Remuneration and Appointments Committee.
- Embedding consent into the student life cycle. SP asked if the £10k funding was sufficient

PG

RH/DB

to fund this project and if it was seed-funding for this year or multiple years. MW replied that the current amount allocated is to get the project off the ground and design the process but there are further funds available in the budget to move the project forward in subsequent years. She went on to say that this is a novel and ambitious project that has the potential to roll-out to other universities, spearheaded as it is by the current passionate Sabbatical Officer group.

7. University update

MW updated the Board as follows:

- Sector overview. This is a period of major policy change for higher and further education with the appointment of the new Education Secretary and the expansion of the role of the Minister for Further and Higher Education. There are currently three major consultations ongoing: Office for Students Conditions for registration B3 which will monitor university performance on Continuation, Completion and Progression and be included in the annual HESA return to inform targets across the sector, across those areas split by population and by student characteristic; Teaching Excellence Framework, with major changes as to how universities will be measured as part of TEF; Access and Participation, plans to be changed mid-cycle with a new Head of Widening Access and Participation at the Office for Students who is driving new expectations. A major speech was also given by the Minister of Further and Higher Education at a recent UCAS Conference trailing changes to funding for universities and new proposals on certain aspects of the Augar Review are due to be imminently published. Some of these have been leaked to the press and are likely to focus on student fees and loans, a reintroduction of number caps and the reintroduction of minimum entry requirements on which fee loans would be contingent. In response to RE, MW said she believed that there would be a consultation on this latter element. She said that UH's response to this should be robust particularly where it will impact on widening access for students. She said she felt this proposal was not equitable and was in fact deeply discriminatory. For example, minimum entry requirements may preclude many mature students, who come from non-traditional backgrounds without the proposed requisite GCSEs, from returning to university. She suggested that many universities may see a drop-off in recruitment if this is introduced but there could, however, be an opportunity to explore how apprenticeships or foundation years could be used in that space. SP said that this change would also limit access for those with undiagnosed learning conditions such as dyslexia and dyspraxia.
- Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The current Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Matthew Weait is leaving UH to take up the role of Director of the Continuing Education Department at the University of Oxford. Professor Julie Newlan, currently Pro-Vice Chancellor Business and Development, will step into his role temporarily from February 2022 to June 2023 and during that period there will be a new recruitment process for a new Deputy Vice-Chancellor.
- NSS and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). The NSS is open and is currently being promoted, supported by the Sabbatical Officers and SCOs. PTES is open nationally now but not being promoted within UH just yet.
- Semester A Student Voice questionnaire. Analysis of results has now been received and completion is up very significantly on pre-pandemic levels from approximately 6% to around 18% completion. The low response rates can largely be accounted for by the number of modules for which there is a zero response. MW said she is working with Deans to understand this more fully. If an aggregate of all responses is taken, student satisfaction has increased by 6% overall. If this could be drawn into the NSS, a further uptick in the

results of that and the league tables would be achieved. MW is also working with Deans on the most challenging aspect of the feedback which is the quality of teaching interactions. Through the Herts Learning process, the design of teaching is being worked on and MW said that she was confident that UH would emerge from this with very well-designed, flexible programmes of study.

- Covid-19. Communication on the changing rules around Covid-19 has been underway as the university exits the pandemic. MW noted that from September, UH would offer a much more familiar campus-based experience to students. In response to DB, MW said that there have been many positives that have come out of the pandemic online learning experience and in being able to offer teaching and learning more flexibly, particularly the one-to-one pastoral and academic skills support. However, the Government narrative is very much focused on face-to-face interactions on campus which does not take into account the positive impact that greater flexibility and blend has had on narrowing the BAME awarding gap, on assessment performance or on the redesign of social study spaces for example.
- Academic skills support and timetabling. Reviews are currently underway on both these areas.

8. Remuneration and Appointments Committee Update

DB reported that the main focus of the Committee is currently the replacement of External Trustees to the Board as SP completes his term of office in Summer 2022, with remaining External Trustees completing theirs during 2023. DB thanked the Communications Team for their work in advertising the upcoming vacancy across a variety of recruitment websites and in producing the information booklet. Applications close on 27th February 2022 with interviews to be held on 9th March 2022.

9. Finance and Audit Committee Update

RH reiterated that the HSU forecast will be revised downwards, as reported earlier in the meeting, still positive against budget to reflect a slowdown in trading in the Forum in January and February 2022. Some of this is in line with typical student behaviour at this time of year but the Covid-19 Omicron wave at the beginning of 2022 impacted trading. Looking back, SF noted that the surplus HSU is forecasting comes out of the intensive work and turnaround that RH and her team have implemented over the last few years to improve the financial position. She went on to say that the Committee had decided to act cautiously in respect of the current surplus as HSU's position is still unknown for the next 3-6 months. She said that the Committee will continue to think about reallocating any surplus into student welfare somehow, primarily because HSU exists for the benefit of its members.

RH reported that the Committee had also examined two current HR policies:

- Safeguarding policy. Signposting to both students and staff who raise issues will be outlined more explicitly in the policy.
- Menopause policy. To re-examine the rights of women who may be experiencing menopause. It was also highlighted that the policy should consider male menopause and LP will explore this more fully.

10. Term 1 Engagement Update

The Board received the Term 1 Engagement Update and SO reported on the key findings and recommendations. The presentation is available in the Teams channel of today's meeting for those Trustees interested in examining the data in more detail. SO noted that this research is key in terms of how HSU supports Sabbatical Officers and SCOs in making sure that the student voice is heard throughout the university.

MW said that HSU has a reputation for publishing some excellent research reports and they are valued across UH.

RH noted that there is only one year to run on the current three-year Strategic Plan. This research gives impetus and focus to a new Plan. She said that it is now the time to begin to consider what HSU's strategic approach might be going forward and to begin to have conversations with key stakeholders. DB agreed. He said he was very conscious that the time is now approaching where the strategic planning must be reviewed. Furthermore, DB said that he felt the Board would have no problem in supporting the recommendations coming out of the research. He asked if there was a priority order. SO replied that it would be very hard to decide between the three key areas of focus: re-establishing societies, the Advice and Support provision and the continued development and growth of research. DB said that this could be further explored as part of the strategic planning work but he thanked SO for this timely and most useful presentation of data today. RH said that the three recommendations speak to three priority strands in the Strategic Plan, with the fourth surrounding the HSU and its stability from a financial and HR point of view. These recommendations focus on Student Success and Wellbeing (the Advice and Support provision recommendation), Student Voice and Insight (the research recommendation) and Student Communities (the re-establishment of societies recommendation). She said, therefore, that the recommendations are very much driven by key themes at the very core of HSU's mission so they cannot be prioritised against each other. In terms of funding, it could be argued that the research should potentially be prioritised because it does power much other work but RH said she hoped that all these initiatives could be supported. RH suggested that a discussion in respect of the next iteration of the Strategic Plan should be tabled at the next Board Meeting.

RH

11. AOB and Close

DB wholeheartedly thanked ZHS, on behalf of the Board, for her work to date in her role as VP Education. He said her efforts and contribution were very much appreciated and he noted how well-respected she is across the whole of UH, and particularly in the Vice-Chancellor's office. He sent his very warmest wishes for her continued success. ZHS thanked DB and the Board, RH and the team for the many varied opportunities and training she had enjoyed this year.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 4th May 2022 at 4.00 pm

Dates for academic year 2021/22:

Wednesday, 15th June 2022 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm