



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 24th February 2021 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)
- 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

DB welcomed Trustees to the meeting. He noted an additional paper, presented by KM and SR, entitled 'Student Success through Covid-19' to be added to the Agenda.

Matters Arising

DB noted that he and RH had asked for any feedback on the Risk Register prior to presentation at UH's Audit and Risk Committee in January. Trustees had not requested any amendments and as such, the Register was approved by the Committee.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

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3. CEO Update

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

- Semester A report. RH noted that HSU has had to be very agile in Semester A, responding to Government changes and student views very quickly.
- The KPI dashboard. She highlighted that there was notable progress against all Board-level KPIs agreed as part of the three-year Strategic Plan, with the exception of the Forum-based footfall.
- Semester A Strategic update – planned activity for the rest of the year. RH took the Board through the planned activity, split by the four key strategic themes.

DB thanked RH for the very comprehensive review.

SP joined the meeting at 4.20 pm.

As part of the CEO Update, SO presented a Student Engagement Update analysing the data across various services for Semester A. DB thanked SO for the fascinating update and asked if he would circulate his presentation to the Board to allow Trustees to examine the data in more detail.

RH closed the Agenda item with an update on the Forum redevelopment plans. She shared the weekly update from the construction company, Willmott Dixon, along with site photos, and she noted how useful this status report is, tracking as it does against agreed targets. She highlighted the following:

- The steel frame for the front entrance canopy is now in situ. This will give HSU its own independent entrance to the nightclub and reduce security costs significantly while improving the customer experience so students can directly access the space.
- The first-floor bar is now undergoing significant changes and taking shape. The back of the auditorium and the Style Bar are being combined to make a space of approximately 550 maximum capacity. The second-floor bar is also making progress.
- The lecture theatre is also moving ahead and is well on target.
- Targets are generally progressing well and moving ahead on pace, and to budget. This, of course, is crucial for HSU if the nightclub in September 2021, dependent of course on national Covid-19 restrictions. The HSU Operations team are commencing work on an events programme flexed with two potential opening dates, September 2021 and January 2022.
- Targets for the coming weeks are also shared in the Forum weekly report as is oversight in respect of safety.

DB thanked RH for the presentation and highlighted what a difference the redevelopment, and particularly the reconfigured entrance, would make to the Forum's operation. SF asked if the presentation could be circulated to the Board.

4. Sabbatical Officer updates (Papers 2a-2e)

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer updates.

KM and SR also presented an additional paper, 'Student Success through Covid-19'. DB said that the paper offers a strategic oversight across the individual projects the Sabbatical Officers are undertaking. KM agreed, noting that the paper details the efforts around this year's Priority

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Campaign and shows the insight and work which has been carried out by each Officer specifically related to academic, social and welfare aspects for the student community. SR concurred, highlighting the collaborative nature of the Priority Campaign.

DB said that this report 'raised the bar' for future Sabbatical Officers, setting an extremely high standard. RH echoed DB and said that not only should KM and SR be proud of this work but the whole Officer team should congratulate themselves for working so effectively and positively, particularly in the remote working environment.

RH also noted that the much of the Officers' work has come out of the Semester B 2019/20 HSU Covid-19 Student Experience Survey (COVID Report). RH said she felt that this output was a reflection of the previous reconfiguration of HSU's non-commercial offering. She said the changes that had been introduced to the infrastructure were now clearly 'bearing fruit' and it ensured Sabbatical Officers were much better placed to more effectively represent the student voice. DB concurred.

5. University Update

MW updated the Board as follows:

- Communication. MW offered her thanks for the open and supportive ongoing conversations that have been undertaken with RH and the Sabbatical Officers, as well as with the PVC Student Advisory Group.
- Personal tutoring. MW restated her absolute commitment. She noted that the framework that had been implemented during the last academic year was 'loose' and, as such, had been interpreted differently across Schools. As part of the current business planning round, MW has requested Deans to ensure that every School has a fully resourced personal tutoring scheme for the next academic year.
- Student Safety Net Policy. MW highlighted UH's speedy response to amend the policy in line with feedback provided by the Sabbatical Officers.
- National Student Survey. This was launched in February. The percentage of the student population that have completed the Survey is currently at 38%, compared to 31% this time last year.
- Covid-19 Accommodation Guarantee for National Lockdown. MW noted that UH's commitment is to provide a refund to students who were unable to use their accommodation due to the National Lockdown. UH are considering exactly which date this will apply from and recommendations will go before the Vice-Chancellor's Executive later this week for approval. MW also noted that UH has directed that the recent sector-wide injection of funds by Government for students in hardship should benefit students in private landlord accommodation as a priority. Any student who applies and meets the criteria will receive £300 towards accommodation hardship.
- National Lockdown. About 6k students were able to access some aspects of learning and teaching after Christmas but the campus has been largely empty. Recruitment appears unaffected and in some Schools recruitment has been significantly higher than expectation. HE providers can now resume in-person teaching and learning for undergraduate and postgraduate students who are studying practical or practice-based courses including Creative Arts. MW noted that a further review on the loosening of Lockdown restrictions is due after Easter for implementation by 12th April. However, UH have highlighted to the Ministerial Taskforce that there is an anomaly in that if providers of personal care services (hairdressers, beauty salons etc) can reopen on this date, it is reasonable to expect that universities should reopen before these businesses. Deans are working on programmes to

bring 'green' courses back to campus on 8th March; 'amber' courses to return as soon as Government allows; and further planning for 'red' courses, where it will be challenging to provide teaching and learning in the remaining weeks of the term. All students will be notified of the status of their course by their programme leader on 8th March. To support the reopening of campus, the business recovery structure has been re-established: comprising an Education and Student Experience Planning Group driving discussions which are picked up by the Business Recovery Group and the start-of-term Planning Group who explore the practical considerations.

- A-level results and Clearing. Government will announce on 25th February the date for the announcement of the A-level results in 2021. Results are expected to be released earlier, possibly as early as July.
- KPI on blended and flexible learning. The first formal impact on student experience will be 2022/23 but there will be some impact for 2021/22. Good practice gathered over the last year is starting to be reflected in planning for next year.
- New guidance on the Teaching Excellence Framework. UH are awaiting the start of consultation process.

6. HSU Elections Update

RH updated the Board on the upcoming Elections and particularly the changes required due to Covid-19. She highlighted the following:

- Applications closed on 22nd February with 104 candidates, 84 of which are applying for the Sabbatical Officer roles to take up their positions on 5th July.
- Voting opens online on 8th March to allow eligibility checks to be undertaken with voting closing on 11th March before the announcement on 12th March.
- Delegates are sent annually to the NUS Conference and thus 4 candidates are also being elected in addition to the 4 Sabbatical Officers, making 8 delegates in total.
- Elections are overseen by the HSU Staff Elections Committee, chaired by RH. NUS is the Returning Officer.
- Elections are particularly competitive amongst certain demographics of students.
- HSU have actively targeted broadening the candidate pool, particularly those students who identify as female, BAME students and those from underrepresented schools. This has had mixed success and the candidate pool is not as diverse as is desirable. DB said that this is an issue that is in the 'spotlight' for next year and beyond.
- Key changes made this year have been around physical campaigning which has been disallowed as has print material. All campaigning must be online and campaigning teams must be small. HSU is offering support and guidance about online campaigning, as well as collating student feedback around the top issues they would like the incoming Sabbatical Officer team to focus on. It is hoped this will guide the incoming team with their Priority Campaign next academic year.
- In response to SP, RH confirmed that there will be a report and debrief to the Board at the next meeting of Trustees.

7. January 2021 Management Accounts / early forecast (Paper 4a and 4b)

LP gave an update on the year-to-date position. She noted:

- For January, a surplus of £889 was forecast but the actuals came in at £22,408. This is due

to additional income within Commercial from the sale of assets; extended use of the furlough scheme; and cost savings from the Head of Operations post being vacant until May.

- Year to date forecast was a £55k deficit; the actuals show a £7k surplus.
- All departments are below budget due to underspend in 'face to face' activities, a significant refund from the 2020 Summer Ball and continued use of the furlough scheme with five members of staff currently on furlough (four members on flexible furlough; one on full-time furlough). An insurance payment for loss of trading has also been received for £26k. Monthly forecast meetings are being held. The Advice and Support Centre is expected, however, to be in deficit due to a maternity cover.
- BJ asked RH and LP about the hiring of student staff for the Forum's reopening. LP replied that her team are currently contacting students who have previously been employed to ascertain who wants to return, as well as contacting those who went through last year's recruitment process but who were never employed due to the implementation of the first National Lockdown. Students can then be employed as soon as an opening date is confirmed. Approximately 70 student staff will be needed at the Forum.

8. Finance and Audit Committee Update

SF acknowledged the unprecedented financial position and reported that the Committee have discussed where the surplus monies can be spent. KM and BS will present ideas formally at the next meeting of the Committee on 16th April 2021 and once these spendings have been identified, the Committee will revert to the Board for final approval. RH confirmed that the spending would not affect Reserves which will ensure the long-term security of HSU.

9. Remuneration and Appointments Committee Update

DB reported that the main recent focus of the Committee had been the hire of the new Head of Operations who comes with a strong background in the sector, joining HSU 4th May 2021. DB went on to thank UH for the considerable support in the recruitment process, in particular sending thanks to the Assistant Director, Estates Department, who was part of the interview panel.

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 5th May 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Dates for academic year 2020/2021:

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