



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees
Wednesday, 24th November 2021 at 4.00 pm via MS Teams

Present:

- Junaid Ahmed (JA)
- David Ball (DB)
- Rhiannon Ellis (RE)
- Zara Haram Syeda (ZHS)
- Prosasti Ganguly (PG)
- Stephen Isaacs (SI)
- Katie Morton (KM)
- Simon Petar (SP)
- Victoria Udeh (VU)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KMck)

1. Apologies for absence

- Sarah Fuell
- Leena Patel

Non-Attendance

None

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 24th September 2021 and 4th November 2021

The Board approved the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2021.

DB highlighted that the minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021 were split into two parts, Open and Closed Business. Although the minutes are published, the Board reserves the right, where there is something of a confidential nature to discuss, to record discussions as Closed Business, the minutes of these conversations not being circulated beyond the Board. The Board therefore approved both sets of minutes of the meeting held on 4th November 2021.

4. Closed Business

The Board discussed an item of confidential business.

5. October Management Accounts

RH presented the October Management Accounts. She highlighted the following:

- A surplus for the month of £33,011 and year to date of £74,304 against a budget deficit in both cases. Budgeting was undertaken conservatively, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the opening of the Forum and in addition, with the financial year commencing in August meaning no income is recorded for the month and the early part of September.
- Revenue share is 1% of trading income paid to UH with revenue this month totalling £129,982.
- Overall, departments have underspent against budget.
- RH paid credit to the Head of Operations and his team for the successful opening of the Forum, which, despite security challenges, is trading and running extremely well. DB echoed RH's comments.
- RH noted that the current Reserves position is a little high and this will be considered at the Finance and Audit Committee, particularly in light of the financial forecast for the year which is work in progress. She went on to say that at the end of the last financial year, HSU were also outside the Reserves policy but it was agreed to keep it at that level given the uncertainty about the Forum's opening and trading position. In response to MW, RH said that the policy is to retain 10-15% of the Block Grant which has now been exceeded. The Finance and Audit Committee will discuss suggestions as to how the excess might be spent on project work or a technological proposition for example, and this will revert to the Board in the Spring. DB noted that this was not an unusual position, with more income always generated at the start of the financial year and expenditure later in the year. However, in noting that the Reserves were slightly higher this year, he said this would allow HSU to respond flexibly to student demand across the year.

6. CEO update

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

- Interim Report of the UPP Student Futures Commission. The UPP Foundation Student Futures Commission was set up to help the HE sector navigate through the next academic year as it recovers from the disruption of the pandemic with the aim of publishing an interim report and a final report with recommendations about how to support students through a post-pandemic HE system. The work is focused around teaching and learning, student experience and wellbeing, and employability. Students from HSU were offered the opportunity to feed into this via a focus group alongside a follow-up piece considering the views of Vice-Chancellors in terms of next steps for universities. RH drew the Board's attention to the link to the report in her paper.
- Publication of Diverse Adversities Report. A research report, centred around the BAME student journey, from HSU's Senior Research Coordinator. BAME students spoke in depth about their love for HSU's diverse community alongside adversities that they have faced. RH drew the Board's attention to the link to the report in her paper. She and DB congratulated the Senior Research Co-ordinator on an excellent piece of work.
- Advice and Support Centre. RH noted the overview of the Centre in her report and the changes

in the level of demand for their services with 70% more students are being supported than this

time last year. RH said that the Centre is certainly adequately staffed to support this increase with an additional student member of staff hired to support the Buddy Scheme. Financial hardship makes up around a quarter of all casework and cases can be complex, particularly for international students. Approximately 5% of all casework relates to course withdrawal which is resulting from high levels of student debt for some students. A further 4% of all casework involves students' involvement in HSU services. DB asked if the Centre staff were managing given the huge increase in demand on their services. SO replied that the staff do cope very well with high demand. However, much of their time is absorbed by the Buddy Scheme in the short-term. New software is coming on-stream and this should relieve the team of the manual processes involved in administrating the Scheme which in turn will free up staff to focus more fully on casework. KM asked if it was possible to redirect those students approaching the Centre to become involved in HSU services to also relieve capacity. RH replied that there is good signposting in place but a recent hire will offer support to the team in this area as well. JA asked how much follow-up on cases the Centre team are able to offer. RH said that the team always follow-up on progress. However, because some information cannot be shared and passed back to the Centre, the team cannot follow the individual student journey, and thus are not always aware of outcomes.

7. University update

MW updated the Board as follows:

- Building on achievements from last year's NSS and NUSS 2022. MW said that this centres on building a strong learning community and making sure that students are provided with support and intervention at the right point in their journey to minimise the number of withdrawals. Approximately 6.1% of students withdraw from courses which is in line with the broader sector. This academic year a new engagement monitoring process has been introduced and this reports that only 4% of students were referred through the process and of those 4 out of 5 responded to communications initiated as part of the process. MW said she was very pleased with this, noting however that it very much relies on what is done as the next step to re-engage students with their studies. There have been some challenges in terms of additional work for staff involved in the process but the overall impact is positive. UH is gearing up for the NSS 2022 and SCOs will be involved to offer support. The realities of re-engaging with face-to-face teaching and learning by students will play through into feedback. MW noted there are no direct questions in the NSS 2022 which ask students to reflect on the Covid experience.
- Clear instruction around assessments and increasing the number of study spaces on campus. MW has been working with the PVC Student Advisory Group and VP Education on a response. Communication is going out to students later this week with an update.
- Student timetables for Semester B. There will be an increase of face-to-face teaching and learning in Semester B and these timetables will be released in near final format on 10th January 2022. This will give students time to review or change arrangements before term starts. All students will see an increase in face-to-face time. Work on plans for inducting students for Semester B are also underway with many more students joining UH at this point than previously.
- Access and Participation. The Minister for Higher and Further Education announced today that universities must rewrite their plans around access and participation with tough, ambitious new targets. A new Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students has been appointed to oversee the reform. Alongside this, funds will be made available to tackle inequalities that create barriers for BAME students to access and take part in post-graduate research. MW said it was disappointing that UH would have to rewrite their, already good, plan which supports the 70% of students who attend the university who come from

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underrepresented groups. She went on to say that UH's plan has a much stronger reach than

many universities. For example, this has now been extended to those students who are estranged from their families and as such, UH will be receiving an award from the Stand Alone charity in recognition of this provision. UH has also made exceptional progress in almost eliminating the BAME Awarding Gap for students. RH highlighted that the BAME Student Advocate Programme featured as a case study on the Office for Students website as an example of best practice in the sector. Furthermore, MW noted that the Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence from Advance HE was awarded to UH's student-staff BAME success working group in recognition of collaborative work that has made a demonstrable impact on teaching and learning. Moreover, UH has been ranked 16th in England for social mobility impact in a new report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies in partnership with the Sutton Trust and the Department for Education. In terms of good practice and being recognised for such therefore, MW said that UH had much less to be concerned about than others in the sector. For them, this will be a significant shake-up and challenge to their practice. MW said the challenge for UH came in being more vocal and in influencing government policy, as well 'keeping steady' on the institutional action plan whilst always looking for new areas of innovation.

DB left the meeting and SP took the Chair at 4.45 pm.

8. Sabbatical Officer Report

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer Report reflecting on recent successes and challenges.

KM asked if students were still encouraged to have a civic duty, ie to build a community outside of campus as well as within in. PG suggested that she would speak to the Dean of Students and report back. RE noted that Creative Arts students have been approached to improve the local underpasses to make them brighter, lighter and to feel safer as part of the Safer Streets Fund initiative.

VU asked for clarification on email circulation lists as some students have complained that they did not know about certain events. ZSH confirmed that communications are sent to all students.

9. Risk Register to include Covid Register

The Board received the Risk Management Statement which outlines the approach HSU takes to managing risks which affect the organisation and the procedures it utilises to enable it to manage those risks. RH asked the Board to note this document which puts the Risk Register into context.

The Board then received the latest iteration of the Risk Register including specific risks relating to Covid-19. RH noted that in particular with reference to the latter, although nationally there are few government restrictions, it is beneficial to keep these risks in the foreground.

RH went on to highlight the new risk noted under Technology, particularly in light of the cyber-attack that affected UH last year even though HSU were relatively unaffected. Some of the HSU IT provision, such as MS Teams, are UH-based systems. Others such as finance and HR systems and the HSU website etc are cloud-based and outsourced. SP asked if risks surrounding IT would significantly increase any costs on insurance. RH replied that no additional costs have come through on the recent insurance renewal.

In response to RE, RH said that many of the risks noted have been initiated by the SLT. Some issues

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have been included at the request of the Board and also at the request of the UH Audit and Risk

Committee. Some of the items listed on the Covid Risk Register were raised by last year's Sabbatical Officer team as a result of issues students were raising and how students were engaging with online learning. SP noted the legal requirement to hold a Risk Register. He went on to say that he agreed that it was extremely sensible to keep a separate Covid-19 Risk Register given the uncertainty that has dogged the pandemic.

10. Annual Schedule of Compliance

The Board received the Annual Schedule. RH noted that this has been updated to include the new members of the SLT and consideration as to how HSU works with UH on the management of the Forum. The Board approved the Schedule.

11. Health and Safety Policy

The Board received the Policy and it was approved.

12. HSU Code of Conduct

The Board received the Code of Conduct and it was approved.

13. HSU Complaints Procedure

The Board received the Complaints Procedure and it was approved.

KM asked how students are encouraged to come forward if anonymous complaints are not accepted. RH replied that often with anonymous complaints, there is little HSU can do in response, particularly if the complaint is of a personal nature. Anonymity gives protection for staff but there is an ability to override it on those issues where this is no impact in progressing the complaint.

14. AOB

VU asked if students are in debt, is it too late for them to clear any outstanding monies owed. MW replied that she thought it would very much depend on individual circumstances as the team with responsibility in this area look for every possible opportunity for the students to pay and to retain them at UH. MW went on to say that if VU had a specific student that she was concerned about, she should speak to her directly. She said that terminating a student is the absolute last resort for UH.

Meeting ended at 5.40 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 23rd February 2022 at 4.00 pm

Future dates:

Wednesday, 4th May 2022 – 4.00 pm

Wednesday, 15th June 2022 – 4.00 pm

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