



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Friday, 24th September 2021 via MS Teams**

Present:

- Junaid Ahmed (JA)
- 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)
- Victoria Udeh (VU)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Alun Minifey, *Head of Operations, HSU* (AM) (in part)
- 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 all Trustees to the meeting with a particular welcome to the new incoming Sabbatical Officer team and to the new incoming Student Trustees. Trustees introduced themselves. DB reminded the Board that all discussions are confidential but that the minutes are published. Should there be an issue for discussion that requires strict confidentiality, this can be explored during a 'Closed' discussion and minuted accordingly.

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

Signed Dated

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday, 6th July 2021 at 4.00 pm.

DB drew the Board's attention to the discussion on page 7 of the minutes in respect of the proposed changes to the Elections process and the work of the Elections Review Working Group. Given the Board's concerns expressed at July's meeting, more work is being undertaken. Given the busy agenda today however, DB and RH suggested that this issue is brought back to the next meeting of the Board, scheduled for October, which will allow Trustees to enjoy a full and unhurried discussion.

4. CEO Update and Quality Student's Union update (Papers 1a and 1b)

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

- Priorities for the year aligned with the Strategic Themes. RH took the Board through each of the goals and explored how HSU will be working to achieve these.
- Recent award to HSU of the NUS Quality Students' Union accreditation. This is an NUS led initiative that benchmarks Student Unions on a variety of quality standards. Over the course of the first six months of 2021, a submission of evidence of work on behalf of students in all areas of operation and a range of conversations between NUS and key stakeholders took place. HSU were awarded an 'Excellent' classification in eight of eleven categories. RH shared with the Board several recommendations that NUS made, coming out of the assessment, as to how HSU can move forward which will help to shape and focus work in the coming year. On behalf of the Board, DB offered his congratulations to RH and her team on the award and noted the enormous amount of work involved.
- Risk. RH noted a risk overview across several day-to-day issues. This sits alongside the more formal Risk Register of broad and continuing concerns, updated and presented to the Board every six months. She noted that it was more than likely that one or two of the day-to-day risk issues may be escalated to the Risk Register in due course. In particular, she highlighted:
 - A shortfall of the numbers of students living in halls which has the potential to impact commercial activity. A reduction in the size of the Forum venue partially mitigates this. This issue is monitored closely through financial performance review and the activity of the Finance and Audit Committee.
 - Reputation management associated with student feedback in respect of the blended flexible learning rollout. Mitigation includes continued conversations with a diverse range of students to ensure the full picture of student views is included in UH feedback.
 - Service closures related to Covid related outbreaks. This is currently reflected in the Risk Register and is actively managed.
 - The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill was introduced to Parliament to tackle what the Government refers to as the 'growing chilling effect on campuses' whereby it feels students and academics are being silenced and censored. DB noted the contentious nature of this issue and the variety of political opinions held. However, he reminded Trustees it was not for the Board to engage in political discussion but rather for HSU to work appropriately to enact the legislation regardless. This issue is currently noted within the Risk Register and risks associated with the current landscape are well managed and adequately mitigated. However, the new risk of the Bill is that it specifically addresses Student Unions so the risk moves from reputational to legal. Despite minimal support from NUS, HSU is working with others in the sector and with

UH to understand the implications as the Bill moves through Parliament. In response to SI, RH said that not only had NUS undertaken very little lobbying to Government on this issue but also in terms of engagement with Student Unions in terms of impact and mitigations, their output had been minimal. SP commented that, to offer some context, his understanding was that the Bill was some very considerable way away from becoming legislation and this may explain why Government interaction or lobbying has been minimal.

5. Sabbatical Officer Priorities 2021/22

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer report which set out the priorities for the team over the coming academic year.

SF thanked the team for their presentations. She highlighted the very important and creditable aim of reducing harassment on campus but asked the team to clarify what types and levels of harassment are being experienced by students. RE said that recent research suggests that some students are experiencing behaviours of harassment that they did not realise constituted harassment alongside other micro-aggressions and some forms of racism on campus. She went on to say that part of her remit this year would be to fully establish the extent of these harassments on campus. SF said that she would very much like to understand the issue more fully. SI expressed some disquiet that the issue was listed as a priority for more than one Officer and wondered whether this was perhaps a greater issue than was previously known. He asked the Officers to consider areas of overlap to ensure a joined-up approach but noted that if this was a bigger issue, the Board should consider discussing this at length in due course. DB suggested that the Officer team meet subsequent to today's meeting to revert with an update at the next meeting of the Board in October. MW also asked the team to include an update on the work and call to action by Government that the Dean of Students is undertaking on the same issue. In addition, SF asked RE and the Officer team to therefore add detail and action plans to their 'big picture' thinking across this issue and other priorities. SP noted that the Board would, of course, fully support Sabbatical Officers in their work.

KMo asked how students would be supported should there be another Covid lockdown with restriction of movement within Halls. JA replied that encouraging students to engage with Societies, through sport and with each other in their respective common rooms should dilute aspects of loneliness. VU went on to ask JA to consider athletics and track and field events in his event planning.

KMo asked the team what research was underway to understand digital poverty on campus and whether HSU were working with any charities or partnerships to manage any shortfall. ZHS noted the LRC PC loan scheme last academic year which will be extended to a 24-hour loan period this year. She also noted the global shortage of computer equipment currently which has delayed new orders coming onto campus.

DB thanked the Officers for the significant levels of work and consideration that had gone into the report which bodes well for their term in office.

6. University Update

MW updated the Board as follows:

Signed Dated

- Recruitment for this academic year. UH have committed to work to increase tariff entry

criteria given that students almost always outperform the entry tariff. Consequently, undergraduate recruitment is down this year but postgraduate recruitment is up. This will cause some shift in the shape of the university and will require thought on investment in teaching and learning and the estate. Change in demographic will also impact accommodation as first-year students typically live-in university accommodation, postgraduate students typically living independently off-campus. New postgraduate students are continuing to be recruited and registered for this academic year, with postgraduate and undergraduate students currently being welcomed onto campus.

- Outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS), The Guardian University Guide 2022 and The Times Good University Guide 2022. UH rose thirteen places in The Guardian's league table and also rose in The Times' league table UH, albeit by a smaller number of few places. UH performed very well in the NSS results, achieving above the sector for Student Voice and Learning Community. MW acknowledged the work ahead in retaining the ground won. Coming back onto campus after the pandemic is bringing into sharp relief concerns of students and how they overlay with external agenda in the press and politically to shape the student experience.
- Outcomes of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). UH performed strongly this year, albeit with a small sample, particularly in Assessment and Support. The most challenging comments were around teaching and organisation and whether the courses were intellectually stimulating. MW said that she felt this may partly be explained by the swift move from face-to-face to online teaching and learning during the pandemic but clarity will be gained on this issue when the survey is repeated next year. UH have an option not to participate in PTES but the university has decided to undertake the survey every year for the foreseeable future due to the strength and growth in postgraduate recruitment. She said that the majority of postgraduate recruitment sits within the Business School and the School of Physics, Engineering and Computer Science which puts pressure on staffing. MW noted that there is a challenge in meeting student expectation in both of those Schools this year but that she is in regular dialogue with the respective Deans.
- Timetabling. MW acknowledged the rather faltering release of the student timetables at the start of this academic year when at this point in the year historically, it would be normal to have almost complete timetables. However, the challenge this year is that although timetables were published on 3rd September, there were more gaps than normal and there was much more sensitivity about the extent to which teaching and learning was online or face-to-face. Agreed timetabling principles have reduced room capacities to 75% and hence the university is not operating with a full estate. Students are seeing far less teaching on their timetables with between 4 and 11 hours of face-to-face teaching per week. MW noted that this is a disappointment but a pragmatic, if uncomfortable, response in terms of implementing Government advice. She said that she would be working, alongside the Marketing and Communications team and the Sabbatical Officers, to establish how they can better communicate the situation to students, as well as working to increase the number of face-to-face hours of scheduled teaching through Semester A and into Semester B. In the longer term from 2022/23, the first batch of programmes will have been developed under Herts Learning where there will be more, more valuable face-to-face activities in smaller groups, with more one-to-ones alongside some lectures, with increasingly well-designed online activities which allow students flexibility and options in the way they access learning.
- PVC Student Advisory Group. The terms of reference have been revised and the membership has expanded to allow a more representative group of students to give a broader voice.

SP noted the rather sobering nature of MW's report. He asked if impacts on students in terms of timetabling would be solely restricted to this academic year or if it was likely to be extended. MW

replied that Semester A was likely to be challenging in terms of face-to-face learning. She highlighted the very likely outcome of increased sickness amongst staff and students as winter approaches and therefore, should face-to-face teaching become increasingly difficult, UH must ensure it has a coherent and extensive online offering to sustain students. She said she did not, in any way, want to undermine student disappointment but that she was comforted that should absence reach 15-20%, as seen in many secondary schools currently, students would be able to continue to study. She noted that she will be asking for the cap on the restriction of space to be lifted to begin to increase the amount of face-to-face teaching that can be offered going forward. Next academic year should offer a much more normal set of constraints on the use of space after a further year of developing online provision and resources.

DB thanked MW for her report. He said that he spoke on behalf of the Board in acknowledging the difficulties and constantly changing advice that UH had had to respond to in recent times. He said that he hoped UH saw the Trustee Board as both a 'critical friend' and partner.

7. Year-end Accounts (Paper 3)

LP updated the Board as follows:

HSU ended the year in surplus of £77,147. This is due to a variety of factors including: the receipt of an insurance claim for £20,316; £21,900 put aside for IT costs; £50,365 received from the furlough scheme; and a credit note received for an act booked in 2019 for Freshers Week for the sum of £13,500. Some departments were underspent by a considerable amount so savings were made all round. In addition, a number of staff left throughout the year without being immediately replaced. Like other employers, recruitment was not always easy to undertake and as such was delayed while advertisements, in some cases, were placed on more than one occasion

8. National Centre for Diversity Action Plan

LP reminded the Board of HSU's achievement of the National Centre for Diversity's (NCFD) Investors in Diversity for Small Charities Accreditation, awarded in March 2021, now followed by winning of the 'Student Union of the Year' at the NCFD FREDIE Awards 2021 in recognition of HUS's commitment to embedding the NCFD values of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Engagement. As a result of the surveys undertaken in this process, NCFD have set HSU an action plan, developed by their consultant, which supports HSU moving forward to further embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) into the Union. LP took the team through the various different strands of the plan which will be overseen by a Steering Group, made up of Line Managers and the SLT.

DB expressed his appreciation, on behalf of the Board, for the huge amount of work involved in this project and he highlighted LP's strong commitment to taking the various strands forward. LP thanked DP and agreed that it would be useful to bring an update back to the Board at a future meeting early next year.

9. Student feedback shaping HSU activities

SO took the Board through the results and recommendations of the last Student Academic Satisfaction Survey completed in Semester B 2021. This survey was solely for first and second-year

Signed Dated

Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees – Friday, 24th September 2021
undergraduates. He also reported on the research planned, networking opportunities and workshops for this academic year.

DB noted the impressive volume of work undertaken and planned, and said he looked forward to updates over the course of the year. SO thanked DB and agreed it would be useful to bring an update back to the Board at a future meeting early next year.

10. Welcome Week and the Forum reopening

AM reported that Bar 77 had opened earlier in the week to Club and Society committee members, SCOs and sports activators for a 'soft' launch which offered insight and plentiful areas of learning for this new venue. The Forum launches with a Club Night later today, predominantly for international students who are on campus earlier. He noted there were many small snagging issues and that the team were engaging with stakeholders across campus to ensure resolution. He also highlighted the exceptional efforts of the team who have brought the venue to this point. Moving forward, wristbands are sold out for the Welcome period which contrasts with many other Student Union nightclubs. Much effort has been put into the safety and security provision and messaging, given the rather negative perception of the venue previously. AM offered his sincere thanks to UH for their investment in the range of safety measures they provided, for example the increased provision of CCTV fitted as part of the build.

In respect of the Welcome period, he noted that there was as much face-to-face activity offered as is possible along with a full Welcome Fair. Increased ventilation and access to sanitiser have been provided to mitigate Covid-19 as much as possible, along with the hosting of a vaccination centre. Society and Club committee members have also attended training in order to deliver activities.

RH said that she would like to invite the External Trustees to tour the Forum after the Welcome period.

DB noted the scale of the redevelopment of the Forum and the sense of satisfaction to see the venue reopen. He went on to sincerely thank the team for their hard work and considerable endeavours in bringing the venue to launch.

11. Matters to Agree

Appointment of Deputy Chair

RH noted this is a customary appointment made at the beginning of each academic year and she went on to set out the remit of the position. Governance rules dictate that the incumbent must be in a different category of Trustee membership to the Chair and thus, this traditionally falls to the President. To that end, DB nominated RE, seconded by SI and SP. RE was therefore confirmed as Deputy Chair for the 2021/22 academic year.

Appointment of Student Governor

RH noted that this is a significant position, offering the student perspective to the university at the highest governing level and she went on to set out the remit of the post. Traditionally, this position falls to the President. To that end, SF nominated RE, seconded by VU. RE was therefore confirmed as Student Governor for the 2021/22 academic year.

Elections Working Group

Signed Dated

Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees – Friday, 24th September 2021

DB noted that while elections for this group are required, it was felt more prudent to wait until recommendations are brought back to Trustees on the outstanding issues that had arisen after

discussions at the last meeting of the Board in July. The Working Group will therefore revert with recommendations for discussion at the next Board meeting in October.

Finance and Audit Committee

SF set out the remit of the Committee and highlighted the significant nature of discussions that occur. One Sabbatical Officer and one Student Trustee are required to join the Committee. KMo and PG expressed their interest to participate and were duly confirmed as members of the Committee for the 2021/22 academic year.

Remuneration and Appointments Committee

DB set out the remit of the Committee. He highlighted, in particular, that with all External Trustees approaching the constitutional end of their terms of office, the Committee will be involved in recruiting new External Trustees and assisting with an induction programme. One Sabbatical or Student Trustee is required to join the Committee. Both VU and ZHS expressed their interest to participate and it was agreed that they would share the membership, the exact details of which are to be agreed.

12. AOB

DB noted that, going forward, it is hoped to offer a fully hybrid solution to attendance at Board and Committee meetings, giving attendees the choice to attend in person on campus or online. RH confirmed and noted that the technology required to make this possible has been ordered but not yet received, with an expected arrival date in October. In-person attendance will also be subject to finding a space on campus with suitable ventilation and distancing, and will be dependent on any local and national restrictions at the time.

Meeting closed at 5.00 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 27th October 2021 at 4.00 pm

Dates for academic year 2021/22:

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

Wednesday, 23rd February 2022 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Wednesday, 4th May 2022 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

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