



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting  
Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025 on campus and via MS Teams**

**Present:**

Dr Charmagne Barnes (CB)  
Kesar Dave (KD)  
Rohit Mahadevu (RM)  
Umar Mohamad (UM)  
Krishna Singh (KS)  
Rajiv Sudan (RS)  
Bob Walder (BW)

**In attendance:**

Hannah Cosgrove  
Phillip Dowler, *Director of Advocacy and Opportunities, HSU (PD)*  
Rhiannon Ellis, *Academic Experience Manager, HSU, (RE)*  
Sean Ferrie, *Director of Operations, HSU (SF)*  
Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU (RH)*  
Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU (KM)*  
Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU (LP)*

**1. Apologies for absence**

Bob Walder

**Non-Attendance**

Ansa Ithal  
Dr Lucy Atkinson

**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, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2024.

Signed ..... Dated .....

#### **4. CEO Update**

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

- New Vice-Chancellor. RH reported on her recent meeting with the incoming Vice-Chancellor, Professor Anthony Woodman. She noted he had spoken of his most positive relationship with the Students' Union at the University of West London where he is currently Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost. RH noted that Professor Woodman could not have been stronger in terms of his signals about wanting to work productively with the SU. He was also very complimentary about RM who he had met during the recruitment process.
- SU Awards. This will take place on Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> April and Trustees will receive a formal invitation in due course. The new Vice-Chancellor will be in attendance.

#### **5. January Management Accounts**

The Board received an update from LP who highlighted the following:

- HSU is forecasting an end of year surplus of £14,850, as a result of which the creation of four or five student internships will provide employment opportunities for students to help them gain appropriate and transferable skills before they graduate. In response to RS, LP said that these roles were likely to take the form of rotating internships, moving across all of HSU departments, to learn about the business and to increase skillset. These roles would be linked to KPIs and to HSU's Strategy.
- LP confirmed that the representatives from the Students' Union Superannuation Scheme (SUSS) will attend the April meeting of the Board.
- RS asked about progress in the process to contractualise the 'gentleman's agreement', whereby it is understood that UH will 'make good' any losses incurred by Enterprises. RH confirmed that this had been added to the Risk Register while the issue is given further consideration.

#### **6. Enterprises VAT Review by HMRC**

LP reported on the recent review undertaken by HMRC which had come out of their request for relevant information supporting the VAT return for the new group account code. As this was the first return using this group VAT number, HMRC conducted a compliance check. HSU engaged the services of Crowe Ltd, who had previously offered expert advice, to assist with the review and the supply of all due diligence information. HSU successfully passed the check of compliance, and the return is being released. LP noted it was a good opportunity to ensure the robustness of processes in place and for the Finance team to assess their responsiveness. RH noted that this issue has been fed back to UH's Audit and Risk Committee.

*LF joined the meeting at 4.30 pm.*

## **7. Development Month for HSU Staff**

LF reported to the Board on the recent Development Month for HSU Staff. She highlighted the following:

- Development Month was a period for staff to review personal and professional development and included both training sessions and workshops (mandatory and optional) run by external providers and in-house, as well as self-guided training initiatives.
- Staff were very engaged across the Month, with approximately 7-20 members of staff attending each session/workshop. In response to RS, LF said that both the Career Progression in SUs and How to Communicate with Confidence workshops had been very popular amongst staff.
- Feedback suggested more formal sessions run over a longer time period would be beneficial to encourage 'deeper' learning, and the team will take this on board when planning the next event over the summer.
- UM asked if training aligned to individual's roles and objectives. LF replied that this is done on a one-to-one basis when skill gaps have been highlighted and these are addressed directly. Development Month is very much run on the basis of what staff want to teach each other and where demand sits for particular areas of focus.
- In response to RS, LF said that the importance and benefits of networking across SUs, and the sharing of resources, cannot be valued highly enough and this is an area for development that she will be working on. RS agreed, noting that this, in turn, develops individual networks for staff members who can interact with peer universities to the benefit of their role and career.
- LP said that future sessions that are centred around wellbeing and lifestyle are being explored. RS and BW said they would both be delighted to help with leading sessions if appropriate.
- BW thanked LF for the informative update and noted that the importance of training on broader development, building networks and resources, and staff retention is incredibly valuable.

*LF left the meeting at 4.45 pm.*

## **8. Elected Officer report**

The Board received a report on the activities of the Elected Officer team. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS said that once an initial approach had been made, it would be very beneficial to set up a UH/HSU event with the Chamber of Commerce and local SMEs and employers, rather than attach the university to the Chamber's already existing programme. CB asked RM to keep colleagues in the Centre of Education and Student Success abreast of any developments in this area and to liaise regularly as relevant work and research may already exist. RH noted that there is an upcoming discussion planned with the Director of Lifelong Learning and Employment around employability for students.
- CB went on to advise that RM connect with the Head of the Careers and Employment department to draw on research and support from other stakeholders in the work being undertaken to assess employability support for International students in the UK.

- BW said that the close relationship between UH and HSU is one of the major strengths of the organisation and anything that can be done to continue this, and to avoid duplication of efforts, is to be championed. He thanked RM for the comprehensive update.

## 9. University update

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

- Graduations. A very successful and joyous round of 20 graduations has just been completed.
- Strategy 2025-2030. This has recently launched, with three strategic strands. CB leads on the Education and Student Success strand with objectives which HSU will support on. RH and RM have worked closely with CB as this came together. The Education and Student Success strand has been operationalised through the new Student Engagement and Success plan, with six brand new frameworks built in. Consultants are working with the new Centre for Education and Student Success to develop an evaluative framework to monitor impact. The Centre is new, bringing together the Centre for Learning and Teaching, the Careers and Lifelong Learning team and the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance.
- Career Development Framework. To be rolled out on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025. This new framework has three main pillars – Embed, Engage, Elevate. Within Elevate, CB noted that this will encompass the new Herts Excellence Awards which she hopes will make a meaningful difference within Schools and to students. She went on to add that she would share more detail with the Board on this once it has been launched.
- Delays in timeliness of marking/feedback. This has been fully addressed, with Deans now taking full accountability in marking turnaround. CB reported that, as a result, across Semester A across the university there were only eight instances of delays, with a very sound rationale for each. RM noted the very positive feedback he had received from students in respect of course delivery expectations and drastically improved marking/feedback turnaround time. KS also shared his experiences of improvements in his interactions with module leaders in this respect.
- Issues around assessment (fairness/transparency of marking, 'bunching' of assessments, lack of sufficient or appropriate feedback). CB progressed as an institutional action which resulted in the Student Voice questionnaire across Semester A returning zero negative feedback on assessment.
- Student surveys. CB said she has now asked to approve which surveys are going out to students across UH in order to avoid 'survey fatigue', and to keep responses high for those critical surveys, such as the NSS, PTES, PRES and Educational Gain which inform league tables and supply module-level surveys as part of regulatory requirements of the OFS. Trialling, currently, is a move away from the Student Voice survey at the end of every module to a Pulse Check in Week 7 of the module, involving a very brief questionnaire completed in the classroom, feeding back on any changes to students. This has, however, thrown up some unexpected issues in other areas, such as attendance, so there is further work to undertake here.
- NSS. Currently the survey stands at a 44.8% response rate at the end of Week 4 and whilst good, this is 1.2% behind the rate at the same point last year. CB thanked HSU for its part in launching and supporting the survey and asked them to continue to do so.
- PTES/PRES. PTES launches 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025 with PRES to follow.
- AI Policy. CB is monitoring closely, with annual review of UPRs reflecting everything being currently discussed.

- Student continuation. This has improved dramatically across undergraduate and postgraduate students, with withdrawals down. Evidence suggests that making the Personal Tutoring Framework more robust, alongside Herts Academic Skills, has played an important part in this.
- Awarding Gap. This is down from 23.4% last year to 18% this year.

BW thanked CB for her most comprehensive review and noted the impressive volume of work being undertaken.

#### **10. Semester A Impact Overview**

The Board received a presentation on Semester A impact. SF highlighted the following:

- Data issues meant all attendees were not captured over the Freshers' period and therefore, numbers appear lower than last year. This has now been resolved with the help of UH and MSL, the software provider.
- Non-Academic Societies stand at 65, with 2,200 memberships in Semester A but including Semester B, numbers are ahead of the total for last year already.
- SU Network have been able to bring in external brands and vendors to markets which have been very well attended by students across the Semester.
- Over 12,000 students are members of Academic Societies which is supported by auto-enrolment
- 70% of Students Reps have been trained which is a massive jump up on last year.
- October and November was a lean period for student events at The Forum, down in terms of number of students attending and spend per head.
- Private hires continue to grow and go from strength to strength, with bookings in for 2026 and 2027.
- Best Bar None, a national industry accreditation for general operation, customer service, health and safety etc, was awarded to the venue with a 96% score, and SF offered his thanks and congratulations to the team for their hard work in ensuring the quality of all events staged.
- There are rising issues, across the university, in terms of reported harassment, particularly of a sexual nature in the venues. RS noted how worrying this was and asked that the Board be kept informed of progress and metrics in this area. SF said that individuals generally are now more comfortable and quicker to report these instances, which can only but be a good thing. He went on to say that support and follow-ups are made through the Dean of Students' Office, where necessary, the morning after an event.
- Common themes for the Advice and Support Centre continue to centre on tuition fees and academic misconduct, but contact is slightly down with less students reaching out for support.
- Almost £60,000 has been invested in student staff pay across the Semester.
- The Student Leader Conference was a very successful event to bring student leaders together.

BW thanked SF for his update. He noted the enormous volume of work being undertaken and drew particular attention to the success of the Private Hire business. He offered his thanks, on behalf of the Board, to everyone involved.

*FG joined the meeting at 5.30 pm.*

#### **11. Herts Unfiltered – Semester A overview**

The Board received a presentation on the findings of Herts Unfiltered from Semester A. FG highlighted the nature of the student listening project to understand the expectations and experiences of first-year undergraduates (although conversations were welcomed with all students), and to discover any barriers they faced throughout the term. She led the Board through the question sets and data gathered. PD then shared the key themes, challenges, areas of focus and recommendations coming out of the project. He noted that the project is continuing into Semester B.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- CB said how delighted she was with this project and all it had delivered. She thanked the team wholeheartedly for their endeavours in bringing this to fruition.
- CB went on to say that it was important to continue discussions around some of the recommendations, eg reviewing timetabling principles, in order to move these issues forward. RH agreed that this was crucial to ensure momentum was not lost.
- RS said how impressive both the output was and the linkages between the answers and future implementations.
- RS went on to note that those students of Arab ethnicity were in the lower quartiles in a lot of the metric. He asked if there were any particular demographics that weren't represented at all and that needed to be enticed to respond. FG replied that the project head from everyone that they needed to but that there was overrepresentation of the Asian ethnicity, mainly from SPECS. She also noted it would have been beneficial to have heard from more white and black ethnicity students. The team have proactively been trying to achieve data collection from these groups this term.
- BW noted what a great piece of work this had evolved into and thanked the team for sharing the insight with the Board.

*FG and LP left the meeting at 5.50 pm.*

#### **12. Appointment of Elections Returning Officer**

RH reported that NUS had been appointed as Returning Officer for the upcoming Elections. The Board will receive the Returning Officer Report at the next meeting in April.

#### **13. Finance and Audit Committee update**

RS noted the already discussed issues around the Enterprises VAT Review, and that the representatives from the Students' Union Superannuation Scheme (SUSS) will attend the next meeting of the Board in April.

#### **14. People Committee update – Elected Officers Rotation**

The Board received a paper on the issue of Elected Officers rotation, whereby frequent changes to directors at Companies House to reflect the new model of Officer structure, are posing several risks and signalling potential problems to key stakeholders across audit and compliance, financial and

regulatory areas. The recommendation suggests that the President is given an automatic place on the Board and three remaining places are given to three part-time students who will be appointed via the People Committee or Student Council. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS said he fully understood the issues being caused and completely agreed with the process of reworking the current position. He said that whatever route is taken, he would like to ensure that the Board retains diversity and representation in the Officers who are appointed. RH replied that this may suggest favouring appointment by the People Committee. Should Officers be appointed to the Board via Student Council, this would be a democratic style vote, and would not necessarily guarantee diversity in the cohort. However, she did note that diversity is automatically built into the roles so the mechanism is robust.
- BW said that it appeared therefore that the Student Council was the most democratic way forward. He suggested that this was adopted but as a pilot, reviewed after one year.
- RS said it was critical that candidates who put themselves forward know the rules and responsibilities in terms of the Trustee positions. UM agreed that students must be aware of what is expected and that they must show a willingness to abide by those responsibilities.

The Board therefore approved Student Council as the forum through which three vacant Trustee positions will be filled by Elected Officers from the beginning of the new academic year, with an option to review.

## **15. AOB**

### HSU Schedule of Compliance

The Board received the HSU Schedule of Compliance. UM asked RH to review the section around insurance which states it was last renewed in 2023. RH replied that there most definitely was active insurance and that this was an error which she would ensure was amended.

### HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information. RH thanked KM for her efforts in producing this monthly.

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

**Next Meeting: Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

*Dates for 2024/25 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm*

Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025