



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 28th October 2020 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:

- Deanne Shumate, *Audit and Accounts Manager, Hillier Hopkins* (DS)
- Luci Ablett, *Finance Manager, HSU* (LA)
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Luke Delderfield, *Head of Operations, HSU* (LD)
- Leena Patel, *Head of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary* (KMck)

1. Apologies for absence

None

Non-Attendance

None

2. Declarations of Interest

None.

3. Year-end Accounts and Audit Report (papers 1a and 1b)

DB welcomed Deanne Shumate of Hillier Hopkins to the meeting for the review of the Year-end Accounts and thanked her for giving her time to join the Board. He also thanked LA for joining the meeting and noted that as she had only been in post since 01/09/2020 and although she had been involved in the preparation of the Accounts, LA's knowledge would come from the start of this

academic year rather than the detail of last year's financial position.

Signed Dated

DS firstly took the Board through the UHSU Enterprises Ltd Director’s Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st July 2020. As at 31st July 2020, profit was £39,322 which is gifted back to HSU thus ensuring Corporation Tax is not due. DS also highlighted the Government furlough grant as extra income.

DS then went on to present the Trustees’ Report and Financial Statements for HSU for the year ended 31st July 2020, consolidated to include both UHSU Enterprises Ltd and HSU results. In the ensuing discussion, she highlighted the following:

- The difference between the Restricted and Unrestricted funds. The vast majority of income is Unrestricted coming from UH in the form of the Block Grant at £1.176 million and the Grant for rent at £613,919. This latter element has gone down year on year with the Elehouse and the shops now handed back to UH to operate.
- Other income at £64,934 constitutes the furlough monies.
- Total funds for 2020 were £2,579,260.
- Unrestricted funds surplus in the year was £114,280 which ties back to the Management Accounts.
- The £192,721 loss is due to the defined benefit pension scheme. A revaluation for 2019 is currently awaited and the scheme is closed to new joiners. HSU pay a monthly amount towards the overall deficit of £914,797 with the aim to pay this off by 2033; the 2033 deadline has been extended by two years from 2031. RH noted that the deficit is listed on the Risk Register and UH’s Finance Director is briefed accordingly.

DS corroborated DB’s summary that, despite the pension debt, the balance of monies available to HSU stands at £187,524. Because of the very unusual national circumstances in 2020, the balance at year-end was far more positive than otherwise expected. DS also noted that the furlough grant covered many expenses which improved the overall position.

RH, for the benefit of newer Trustees, explained that HSU normally expects to make £20-40k profit per year after many years of loss-making which the Board had worked hard to stem. Historically, HSU has generated a large amount of income through Autumn of each year with spending concentrated into the second half of the year. The rapid shutdown due to the pandemic from Spring 2020 and the significantly reduced spend, allied to the furlough of 5 members of staff, has led to significantly reduced costs and thus surplus. The surplus is a significant turnaround from the £170k deficit position in recent years. However, HSU is predicting that it will be in a loss-making position this year, with an expected deficit at the end of 2020/21 of £45k. The loss is largely a result of costs relating to staff and the lack of the commercial activity, mainly through the closure of the Forum.

DS flagged that the Management Letter would highlight the issue of documentation coming from UH, in respect of Block Grant calculations as an example.

DS thanked LA and her team for their help and support during the process and DB echoed the thanks on behalf of the Board. He also offered his appreciation to DS for joining the meeting and for her work.

The Board accepted the Year-end Accounts and Audit Report for the year ending 31st July 2020.

DS left the meeting at 4.30 pm.

4. September Management Accounts

Signed Dated

RH gave a summary of the year to date position. She noted:

- The closure of the Forum and that smaller elements of income, such as the printing and binding service for students and sales of NUS cards, have been curtailed hence the only form of income is the Block Grant.
- Expenditure is however under budget.
- Forecast predicted a budgetary shortfall of £10,653; year to date there is a net surplus of £5,819.
- There is some departmental overspend which is largely due to a phasing issue; LA concurred. The Advice and Support department are overspent due to a member of staff being on maternity leave, with the role backfilled. Similarly, the Marketing Team incurred some overspend due to the earlier ordering of Freshers' marketing collateral. Essential departments, in general, are very much in line with expectation.
- In terms of budgetary planning, different budget scenarios were put together simultaneously in March/April 2020 in line with UH's planning process: the Forum would open in September 2020; the Forum would reopen in January 2021; and the ultimate version of the budget which was submitted to UH assumes the Forum will be shut for the entirety of the year 2020/21 which is entirely realistic given the national landscape. Therefore, RH assured the Board that the year-long closure of the Forum had very much been taken into account in terms of the budget.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB asked if the strategic plan for the year was effectively financially on track or whether RH and LA anticipated any difficulties during the year. RH replied that because there had been an anticipation of a sharp decline in Forum activity due to the planned redevelopment of the Forum, the situation was always expected albeit that there has been a more significant impact than first thought. The target is for HSU to return a surplus every year but it may be the case that this KPI may not be hit this year. RH expressed her confidence however that other targets around infrastructure and accompanying activities that can be overlaid would be reached.
- MW congratulated and thanked RH and her team for their efforts in achieving a positive outlook for HSU given the difficulties of the year. RH thanked MW and noted how her team had thought creatively and innovatively in respect of how to engage students when more traditional methods of engagement haven't been possible this year. She went on to say how opportunities now presented themselves to consider different forms of engagement alongside a traditional face to face approach while expediting digital infrastructure. This naturally flowed into consideration around how HSU was 'fit for purpose' to support UH's blended learning offerings.
- RH confirmed to SI that the forecast will be ready for the next meeting of the Finance and Audit Committee.

5. University Update

MW updated the Board as follows:

- The aim to respond more swiftly this academic year to the Sabbatical Officers' Priority Campaigns. MW noted that she had received permission to change the title of the former Student Educational Experience Committee to the Education and Student Experience

Committee so that it better aligns with the Strategic Plan. One of the key drivers for

activity in that Committee will be the UH Education and Student Experience Strand Plan for Education and Student Experience. Furthermore, drawn into the action planning for that Committee will be the Sabbatical Officers' campaign commitments. Therefore, the two drivers of activity for the Committee will be UH's Strategic Plan and the Sabbatical Officers campaigns in order to collaborate fully and to continue work to improve the student experience. MW said she hoped this would prove to be a stronger way to cement the relationship between UH and HSU whilst improving the collective student voice on the key UH committee where HSU is represented. She said that the Sabbatical Officers had offered positive feedback thus far.

- UH's Covid-19 Outbreak Plan. MW noted that the Plan was written as a swift response at Government request. Since the initial draft, UH have run a series of continuity workshops where the Plan has been stress-tested against a series of scenarios and as each part of Government guidance has changed, this has been updated. She highlighted the four Tiers of Restriction for the Education and Learning sector and noted that UH is currently operating at Tier 1. No teaching has moved fully online as there have been a very low number of contained cases within UH, mostly off-campus. She flagged that live cases are now published on UH's external web in order for the university to be open, transparent and connected to the community. Furthermore, the Plan has been recently stress-tested against the three local Government Tiers of Restriction and were Hertfordshire to move to Tier 2, MW said that this would not automatically trigger a change to teaching and learning or delivery of services to students. However, an increase of cases amongst the student population would impact learning delivery. She also highlighted the UH hierarchy of Covid-19 decision making. In response to SP's question about arrangements for Christmas, MW said that the majority of students do not live on campus and a proportion that do, stay for Christmas, participating in arranged activities. Meetings have been underway to plan for a possible 'circuit break' shutdown and an early finish to the term. Specific programmes, modules and schools are ready to be closed as soon as possible though there are of course schools such as Creative Arts and Health and Social Work which are more problematic due to the face to face elements of their teaching.
- The UH Board of Governors have confirmed a KPI related to blended/flexible learning for students. This commits MW and her teams to deliver a blended/flexible learning experience to all students before the end of the Strategic Plan. MW said that currently a period of review was being undertaken as to what had gone well in terms of blended learning to date whilst looking at those areas that needed to be brought more up to speed, in order to establish overall what is meant by 'good practice'. She highlighted the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the PVC Advisory Group. Moreover, she noted the different elements feeding into the achievement of the KPI: learning and teaching, the learning environment, the staff working environment and skills, the student journey and student support. She expressed her confidence that the whole process would ultimately build resilience into the curriculum for any future national or global developments. In response to SP, MW noted that UH are in the process of commissioning software to move all of the specification modules, which have developed in an organic and local manner, onto a new database. This will bring cohesion, clarity and oversight. Every programme and module specification for undergraduate programmes will be reviewed by September 2022 with a review of postgraduate modules to start in 2023. Confirmation and review will follow thereafter before the life of the Strategic Plan concludes in 2025.

6. Sabbatical Officer updates (Papers 4a-4d)

The Board received the updates and reports from the Sabbatical Officers.

On behalf of the Board, DB congratulated the Officers for the ambitious and innovative approaches

Signed Dated

Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees – Wednesday, 28/10/20

to their initiatives and for the impressive way they had picked up student issues both within and beyond the university at such a difficult time nationally and for the sector. He particularly commended the provision of the hugely successful live cooking shows on the HSU Instagram and the improvement in the nutritional quality of food packs for quarantining students. He said that he was hugely impressed with the way Officers had focused on and risen to the challenge of the remit of their roles through the Autumn in unexpected and trying circumstances. RH echoed these comments and added her thanks and congratulations on behalf of the staff team.

7. CEO Update (papers 5a and 5b)

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

- The KPI dashboard. She highlighted the RAG ratings marked in amber where work, namely surveys on wellbeing and student identity as members of HSU, is yet to commence. Equally, the research around achieving an NSS score within the top quartile of all HE's Students Unions has not yet been undertaken. She asked the Board to note that the NSS is under review. A consultation is ongoing that both HSU and UH are taking part in, the outcome of which may require this particular KPI to be changed. RH went on to note that a positive start has been made in terms of other research, staff team engagement and financially, as discussed earlier in the meeting. She asked the Board however to note that the RAG rating for the KPI centred on at least 60% of students engaging with at least one HSU service per year was both red and green. Society numbers have doubled year on year, primarily driven by the free Society memberships. However, the red rating is the result of Forum attendance given that the venue is closed. She highlighted the three-year target with a 54% target in 2020/21 and said that this should be kept under review as it may be necessary to revise this KPI downward.
- The Block Grant for the for 2020/21 has now been confirmed at last year plus 1% by UH's Board of Governors. This is notable in the sector.
- The Forum redevelopment project has now received final approval from UH's Board of Governors. Replying to SI, RH said that there was no change to the August 2021 completion date for works as set out in the original plan.
- RH highlighted the operational events and activities that are ongoing in support of the Strategic Plan. She noted the mixture of online and face to face activities with a key focus on representation.
- RH drew the Board's attention to the summary report for the Advice and Support Centre. She highlighted that the Centre's footfall had increased by over 50% year on year with complex casework (housing, financial and academic impacts) through the Covid-19 period. The Centre are still operating off-campus. However, the Manager returns to campus one day a week though it is not possible to facilitate face to face interaction due to the office layout so she will not be seeing students. Students have however responded well to online and digital engagement.

8. Remuneration and Appointments Committee Update

DB noted that the first meeting of the Remuneration and Appointments Committee had taken place to discuss recruitment activity. He said that the Committee was proving to be a useful and beneficial forum.

9. AOB

Signed Dated

DB apologised that the minutes of the previous meeting had not been circulated outside the meeting. This will be corrected going forward.

Meeting closed at 5.50 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 25th November 2020 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

- Dates for academic year 2020/2021:
- Wednesday, 24th February 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm
- Wednesday, 5th May 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm
- Wednesday, 23rd June 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm