



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 29th May 2025 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

Dr Charmagne Barnes (CB)
Hassan Kyambadde (HK)
Rohit Mahadevu (RM)
Lorena Navea (LN)
Pavan Polimuri (PP)
Rajiv Sudan (RS)

In attendance:

Phillip Dowler, *Director of Advocacy and Opportunities, HSU* (PD)
Sean Ferrie, *Director of Operations, HSU* (SF)
Samantha Gibson, *Marketing Manager, HSU* (SG)
Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)
Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)

1. Welcome

RM was in the Chair and welcomed all Trustees to the meeting.

RH noted that the meeting was not quorate. She advised that the meeting could proceed but if the Board of Trustees were required to take a vote at today's meeting, this would have to be deferred.

2. Apologies for absence

Umar Mohamad
Bob Walder

Non-Attendance

Ansa Ithal
Dr Lucy Atkinson

3. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

4. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Wednesday, 9th April 2025.

At the last meeting, RH noted that she would ask CB to brief Trustees on UH's Strategy for 2025-30 at this meeting. This has been deferred until September to allow all External Trustees to be in attendance for the briefing.

The process of trying to synch Board meeting dates with the publication of HSU's Accounts is ongoing.

SF will present at today's meeting on data/trends regarding safety/incidents at The Forum.

RS asked for the presentation made by the SUSS team at the last Board meeting to be recirculated to him.

KM

5. CEO Update

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

- HSU are working closely with UH to align guidance, policies and procedures with the revised freedom of speech code of practice. Although Students' Unions are no longer directly regulated by the Office for Students in this area, HSU remains committed to upholding freedom of speech responsibilities in partnership with UH and within its own practices.
- Three Elected Officers have been elected to serve as Trustees from July 2025, appointed via a vote at Student Council: Mariangel Briceno Riverol (PT Officer for HMLS), Judith Albert (PT Officer for CTA) & Muhtasim Sadat Nibir (PT Officer for SPECS). This process has ensured continued student representation on the Board and is an important governance development opportunity for Elected Officers. Training will be offered to them in the coming weeks.
- Recruitment is in train for one new Student Trustee, with interviews scheduled for w/c 23rd June 2025 with RM and UM on the panel.
- HSU's year-to-date data evidences strong reach and deepening engagement across service areas. RH highlighted a strong increase in almost 1,000 student-led events delivered, co-ordinated by over 200 students which has offered fantastic development opportunities to the cohort. There has been a large increase in Society memberships, as well as over 1,000 Academic Reps recruited, with over 87% trained, which represents significant progress. There has been a decrease in students seeking support from the Advice and Support Centre. As much of the casework focuses on financial hardship, the work undertaken by RM and the Officer team to effectively signpost students to UH's financial support services, along with improved timing of debt repayment, has proven valuable in reducing the overall caseload. The Forum activity is down 9% year on year, which is very much in line with the sector and commercially across UH generally. The team are showing great agility in making up the shortfall through private hire events, bringing in £73k for the year, 35% up on last year, with another £10k forecast to the end of the financial year. SF noted that the most positive element was the relationship building with UH contacts and the wider community, including work parties, conferences, and particularly those from the

Jewish community who are using the venue for bar mitzvahs etc. Finally, RH highlighted the total estimated student pay, including holiday pay, of just under £150k which has been paid to students across the year.

- RH highlighted the Government's new immigration white paper, Restoring Control over the Immigration System, which proposes wide-ranging changes to the UK's International policy. This could have a substantial impact on UH, particularly the Reduction of the Graduate Route from 24 months to 18 months and a proposed levy on international tuition fees. Given the significant impact this may have due to the high numbers of international postgraduates at UH, this has been added to the Risk Register for continued monitoring of any potential financial implications for HSU, including potential impacts on block grant funding and student engagement. HSU will continue to be an active partner in international student recruitment to support UH efforts on minimising impact of policy changes. RM added that he had recently met with Andrew Lewin, MP for Welwyn Hatfield, to discuss the impact. Mr Lewin has been engaging with other constituency MPs with large international student populations, as well as other stakeholders. He has requested any relevant information or success stories around individual students at UH to support collaborative efforts. He also suggested that RM continue his civic engagement strategy with local representatives. RH noted that HSU's Marketing department could provide material to share, particularly from last year's Alliance Group video campaign. RS noted the broader benefits and value add of a student population to a local community/constituency/county.

6. April Management Accounts

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

- HSU is forecasting to end the year very close to budget.
- Enterprises, which was budgeted to make a loss, will end the year in a small surplus due to the private hire business. This is a huge achievement in a difficult environment.
- There was some extra expenditure due to the End of Year Show for students.
- Departments have spent as expected with the exception of Academic Experience, who have had some staff shortages. Two Herts graduates have, however, now been employed to fill these vacancies, commencing their roles on 16th June. LP noted that across the HSU staff team 60% are, in fact, Herts graduates.
- One intern has started with further interns to be posted to Marketing and Community Events in due course.
- RS noted that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee did not meet in advance of today's Board Meeting.

7. Elected Officer Update

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

- RS thanked LN for her articulate and detailed report. He asked if/how it was possible to 'unblock' funding to equip the sensory room on College Lane to move this project forward. LN replied that with no funding given and due to the high cost of the sensory equipment, fundraising is planned for next academic year. LN said she would also be raising this issue

8. University Update

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

- Government's new immigration white paper, Restoring Control over the Immigration System. Given the International student population at UH, this will have significant impacts. Changes include:
 - Reduction to the Graduate Route period down to 18 months which could make studying elsewhere, particularly in parts of Europe where there are no such barriers, a more attractive option.
 - Levy on International student fee income which needs to be reinvested into skills. UH will participate in any consultation but an announcement on this is not due until the Autumn Budget.
 - Strengthening of the requirements that all sponsoring institutions must meet in order to recruit International students by raising the Basic Compliance Assessment metrics i.e. a sponsor must maintain a visa refusal rate of 5% or below (UH: 3.68%), course enrolment rate of at least 95% (UH: 98.8%) and a course completion of 90% (UH: 92%) in order to pass the compliance threshold. UH currently meet all the metrics but this will need monitoring in the arena of attendance for students which encourages continuation and completion rates.
 - Overseas recruitment agents must sign up to the Agent Quality Framework. UH were an early adopter of this and demand full certification from ICEF or the British Council.
 - Institutions must consider the local impacts of international recruitment on housing/schools/health provision etc. This is not currently an issue for UH and there is capacity to house more students than the university currently does.
- Sexual Harassment Training. This will be online for all students once LCS advise on the platform.
- NSS. Results are due 9th July. There is, however, a problem with the new platform that OFS use to disseminate the results across the sector which might result in delays to the release of data on how UH fared against competitors and subsequent analysis.
- PTES. Closes on 13th June. CB asked RM and the Officer team to continue to encourage students to participate in order to increase the response rate.
- Student Voice questionnaire end of module feedback mechanism. Completion rates have historically been as low as 9%, as high as 19%. A mid-module survey/pulse check, of five questions with feedback in module, has now been introduced. This has been piloted with HBS and SPECS with good response rates: HBS Level 7 scored 37% response rate; Levels 4 and 5 scored 29%; SPECS Level 5 scored 23-24%. CB said this was a way of, in fact, changing the narrative and encouraging students to see their education as a partnership with the university, asking their advice to improve the learning experience.
- Attendance. Issues around attendance were discovered during the process of the pulse survey. CB stressed that UH's students need to engage and participate, and attendance is part of that engagement. Different ways of improving and monitoring attendance across undergraduate and postgraduate courses are being examined. This will ultimately feed into the TEF which is next running in 2028.

RM thanked CB for her very interesting and detailed update.

SG joined the meeting at 5.00 pm.

9. Annual Marketing Update

The Board received an update from SG. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked SG for the most interesting report. He asked how the brand is monitored, particularly given that many Societies manage their own social media channels. SG responded that branding issues are more commonly identified through merchandise rather than social media content but that the Marketing department do 'keep an eye' on output. RS suggested creating a simple "dos and don'ts" guide for social media use, focusing on how to protect and uphold the brand. SG noted that as part of Society training, guidance is already provided on how to make the most of social media platforms.
- In response to RM, SG explained that students are at the forefront of content creation, and the team is guided by them to stay responsive and in tune with changing trends. Regular reporting helps identify what content is performing well and what isn't. Where appropriate, the team also takes opportunities to engage with trending content on platforms like TikTok.
- SF commented that the team possesses a strong level of technical skill, as staff and student staff have been actively upskilled. Wherever possible, Herts graduates have been employed, supporting continuity and effective succession planning. RH added that HSU is recognised across the sector for its strength in this area.

RM thanked SG for her very informative presentation.

SG left the meeting at 5.20 pm.

10. The Forum – incidents / trends

The Board received an update on reported incidents and actions that have taken place this year at the Forum. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked SF for the very comprehensive presentation.
- LP added that all student staff are currently receiving HSU's Sexual Harassment training, and a wider Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment is regularly reviewed.
- RS asked for Health, Safety and Wellbeing as a standing Agenda item at Trustee Board Meetings.
- In response to RM, SF replied that while sexual harassment incidents have risen slightly, overall incidents are down 20%. He said he felt that students were reporting incidents more frequently now than previously, with a lower tolerance level for such occurrences generally seen, not only across the university, but also in wider society. RH noted that because of the UH training in the same arena, students are explicitly made aware of reporting channels which is extremely positive, but this may well lead to an increase in the number of reports.
- SF responded to RM, noting that there had not been a single report of spiking in the Forum this year. Around three years ago, spiking incidents peaked, coinciding with heightened national awareness. This may have acted as a deterrent. RS emphasised the importance of equipping people with the knowledge to prevent and respond to spiking. SF added that this messaging is actively promoted within the venue, including the provision of drink covers and other preventative measures.

KM

- PP asked about the guest policy. SF replied that every guest is attributed to a student and consequences can be enforced for misconduct and bad behaviour. These may include a ban from the venue or in the case of criminal behaviour, referral to the police.

11. Leadership Development Programme

RH informed Trustees that a bespoke week-long training programme is scheduled for June, tailored specifically to HSU's Management Team. The programme was designed in response to themes identified through 360-degree appraisals, which were mapped against core competencies. This process highlighted key development areas, leading to the creation of a series of modules focused on topics such as effective delegation within the team, strategic thinking, and empowering student staff for example. The training will be delivered over four days, with a fifth day hosted at Westminster SU. As most Managers have been promoted internally, and many are Herts graduates, this initiative is a key step in developing these staff into leadership roles.

RS asked about a succession plan. RH replied that because HSU is a small team this is not always possible but where talent is spotted, a bespoke approach is adopted. In response to RM, RH noted that a comparably sized is Greenwich SU. She said that HSU's structure is agile and responsive, designed and responsive around the student cohort and their needs.

12. Risk Register

The Board received the latest iteration of the Risk Register. RH highlighted the following:

- As previously discussed at today's meeting, the Government's new immigration white paper, Restoring Control over the Immigration System, has been added to the Risk Register to monitor any potential financial implications for HSU, including potential impacts on block grant funding and student engagement.
- RS asked if the SUSS Pension Scheme deficit entry could be updated following the presentation at the last Board meeting. RH replied that this will be updated after the revaluation which takes place on 30th June 2025.

13. AOB

Elected Officers end of term of office

LP highlighted that some Elected Officers that are currently not serving as Trustees have completed their terms of office.

HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information.

Close

RH thanked RM for once again chairing the meeting so effectively.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Signed Dated

Next Meeting: Thursday, 26th June 2025