



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting  
Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022 via MS Teams**

**Present:**

- David Ball (DB)
- Rhiannon Ellis (RE)
- Sarah Fuell (SF)
- 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)
- Alun Minifey, *Head of Operations, HSU* (AM)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Leena Patel, *Head of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary* (KMck)
- Dominic Morris, *Blue Edge Training* (DM)

**1. Apologies for absence**

Junaid Ahmed

**Non-Attendance**

None

**Welcome**

DB welcomed Trustees to the Board meeting and, in particular, he offered a warm welcome to DM who will be facilitating discussions around the next iteration of the Strategic Plan.

DB highlighted that this was the last meeting for KM and AM who are both moving on to pastures new. DB said that KM had brought a real sense of 'freshness' to the Board and that her contributions had been substantial and much appreciated. He thanked her sincerely, on behalf of the Board. DB also said that AM had been instrumental in the opening of the Forum, completing a magnificent job. He also, on behalf of the Board, offered his heartfelt thanks to AM for his invaluable contribution.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

None.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the last meeting which was held on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 at 4.00 pm.

**4. March 2022 Management Accounts and 2022-23 Budget**

The Board received the March 2022 Management Account and the 2022-23 Budget. DB highlighted the following:

- The positive nature of the March Management Accounts.
- Whilst the Budget has been approved by the Finance and Audit Committee, the UH planning round has not yet taken place so the Budget is still in draft form.
- On behalf of the Board, DB asked for thanks to be passed to the HSU Finance team for their hard work and endeavours in this area.

**5. CEO Update**

The Board received the CEO update.

**6. Sabbatical Officer report**

The Board received the latest Sabbatical Officer report.

**7. University update**

MW updated the Board on the external and internal challenges that UH are facing as follows:

External challenges

- Growing power and impact of the Office for Students in terms of regulation and the conditions of registration. The OFS has seen a significant change of senior personnel over recent times which has triggered a range of consultations going to the heart of what it means to be a university. UH is working on these consultations, many of which overlap. All of these have the potential to significantly change the landscape in which universities operate and could involve significant internal movements for UH to keep up with the demands of the OFS. The role of the OFS is changing and the reach of its impact, in terms of student experience, is growing significantly.
- New model of student finance from 2025 and the impact this has on the freezing of fees and the impact on student choice and behaviour. Lifelong Learning Entitlement (LLE) will significantly change the way students are granted funding for their degree. Alongside this comes a robust line on freezing university fees forcing them to deliver more with less government funding. This is very challenging for a university such as UH with a number of

programmes with high financial demands such as Creative Arts and Medical programmes. Secondly, alongside this, comes an expectation that students will no longer have a 3-year undergraduate degree as their only option when it comes to spending their student loan which will impact course design and provision. MW went on to say that she suspected the 2025 deadline would be pushed out given the complexity of the issue. She said that it is also likely there will also be a reintroduction of student number controls because the Government loanbook has become unmanageable.

- How UH positions itself as a university to provide value for money in the context of that increasing gap between student expectation and university experience.

#### Internal challenges

- Appreciating and responding to the needs of an increasingly complex student body. UH's identity is one of a university that primarily provides an education for students that fall under the auspices of the Access and Widening Participation Plan. Allied to this, there has been a huge increase in international student recruitment with almost 9,000 students this academic year. Equipping staff to be able to deal with the breadth of expectations that all of these students bring to the university is a significant challenge.
- Delivering on the commitment under the UPP Student Futures' Manifesto to equip students for learning at UH. This requires a very personalised, student focused approach, supporting them through their time with UH to exit the university with a valuable qualification. This will require a reworking on provision for students to engage with their academic course of study whilst still enabling them to feel a sense of belonging, making friends and having fun, and leaving with a sense of pride in the university.
- Performance in external league tables with a gap on what students report back to UH on their experience and how that plays through into performance in the NSS, PTES, league tables and performance in the TEF. MW said that this dissonance is difficult to understand and unpick ie why do students report, face to face, their hugely positive experiences at UH and yet UH is still middle-third in terms of NSS and PTES rankings.
- Student voice. How does UH systematically respond to the various mechanisms that record the student voice, landing key projects that matter to students on a day-to-day basis while still focusing on the 'bigger picture'.
- Modernising services at UH. Many systems are not interrelated, there is a great reliance on 'old tech' to communicate with students and a large amount of 'manual' work is still undertaken. There is a need to modernise these systems which will be challenging in a very restrained recruitment market currently, with far fewer applicants and a far greater number of vacant posts within UH than previously seen.

DB thanked MW for her update and said how important it was for Trustees to receive this information prior to work commencing on the next iteration of the Strategic Plan.

SP said that whilst this presented challenges, it also offered many exciting opportunities. He asked MW what timescales are involved. MW said that the internal challenges are the ones currently presenting such as UH grappling in some Schools, where the majority of the increased recruitment sits, where staff cannot be recruited quickly enough. MW and RH will be working on the UPP Students' Futures Manifesto in the short-term so there is a way of articulating that to students at the start of the next academic year. A comprehensive review of academic skills is also currently underway which MW said she hoped would enable UH to better measure inputs in terms of student performance. The student voice mechanisms work is also ongoing and MW said that she would like to further a discussion with RH before the start of the next academic year to see where else UH needs to give opportunities for students to talk. She said she would like to develop, in a more articulate and meaningful way, the idea of students as 'partners'. The CEG have agreed that

key corporate initiatives will be identified on which to spend corporate reserves around student communication, to redesign this structure moving away from email etc, and also investments in technology to join up disparate legacy systems. She highlighted that Registry, in particular, will receive investment to offer a more 'self-service' facility. Finally, she highlighted that the league tables, NSS and PTES are annual and for the TEF, for which UH currently hold Gold, the new framework will be launched in September after the consultation has closed.

**8. Remuneration and Appointments Committee**

DB referred the Board to the CEO Update which details the Committee's current activities. Priorities have been centred around recruitment. At the next meeting of the Board, a number of Observers will join who will become full members thereafter.

**9. Finance and Audit Committee Update**

SI reported on another fruitful and robust meeting of the Committee recently. RH said that most of the areas that the team discussed are encapsulated in the financial papers that the Board have already received.

*SF joined the meeting at 4.35 pm.*

**10. Strategic Plan 2023-2026**

RH introduced DM who has been instrumental in the development of HSU's last Strategy and who also acts as a coach and mentor for the SLT.

In terms of the strategic framework, RH said that focus remains around four key themes: Student wellbeing and success, Student insight and voice, Student communities, and Students' Union. These form the basis of HSU's charitable registration documentation and are therefore very much at the heart of what the organisation does. While the activities that HSU deliver and develop on behalf of students do change, the framework remains steady at the core of operations.

DM introduced himself and thanked the Board for welcoming him to the meeting today. The Board received a presentation on strategic context and framework. DM to circulate. He reiterated the four themes, as outlined by RH earlier, that form the current strategy which continue to remain the focus for the new Plan.

Trustees then broke out into groups to consider and reflect on one of the four key themes. In order to shape thinking within the theme, DM asked the teams to discuss what activities have now come to a natural conclusion, which are those that need to be renewed or adapted, and which are new and distinctive activities that could be introduced.

*SP left the meeting at 5.30 pm.*

Each group then fed back on their discussions within each 'breakout room' with findings forwarded to DB, RH and KMCK to be circulated to Board members. DM thanked the team for some fantastic ideas. He noted that there always appears to be an interesting perspective around synergy coming through in discussions, whereby good strategies use other parts of the organisation to

enhance the whole. He went on to say that the hardest part of the thinking is inevitably what activities to discontinue as otherwise, there can be a danger that organisations spread themselves 'too thin' unless resources are redirected. Teams must be mindful of this when setting strategy. DB agreed and said that the organisation may have to examine whether activities that are still relevant and could be approached differently rather than be discontinued ie a 'moving on' rather than a 'curtailment'.

DM asked Trustees for any further arising thoughts that they might like to discuss.

SF highlighted that three of the External Trustees reach the end of their term of office in 2023. She suggested that perhaps the individuals could be retained in an advisory capacity in order to continue to support HSU and not leave it exposed in terms of so much experience and knowledge leaving the organisation. DB replied that there were constitutional issues that may preclude this but he acknowledged that this issue is very challenging.

LP said that her group had spoken at length about the need for a flexible, 'moving' strategy, in an ever-changing world, that could be revisited annually in order to be responsive.

KM said that she felt it would be beneficial to have access to students that have graduated into the workplace to offer advice and mentoring to undergraduates. She noted that the Strategic Plan centres on ultimately helping students into the workplace but there are no student voices accessible that have made this transition. DB said that he felt the Alumni team would be very interested to talk to KM to take this forward as they are very keen to build these long-term relationships. SF said that it is also very beneficial to have Trustees that can offer these mentoring opportunities and DM agreed that real experience is incredibly valuable.

DB, RH and KMck will meet on 05/05/22 to collate the ideas and to take the process forward.

DB thanked RH for arranging today's discussion and the facilitation with DM. He went on to sincerely thank DM for his invaluable contribution in informing the onward creation of the new Strategic Plan. Overlaid with the challenges and context that MW provided earlier, the new Plan will be incredibly relevant and important going forward.

#### **11. AOB**

DB asked Trustees if, where possible, they could attend the next meeting of the Board in person. This would be much appreciated as there will be a large number of Observers attending prior to taking up their new roles and a number of Trustees leaving their roles also.

*Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.*

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**Next Meeting: Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at 4.00 pm**

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**DB/RH/  
KMck**