



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 5th May 2021 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)
- Saad Raees (SR)
- Bishal Saha (BS)
- 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)

1. Apologies for absence

Simon Petar

Non-Attendance

None

Welcome

DB welcomed Trustees to the meeting. He introduced Alun Minifey who has recently taken up the post of Head of Operations and welcomed him to HSU and UH.

Matters Arising

DB asked Trustees to note the latest iteration of the Risk Register which had been added to papers for the meeting. He highlighted that there were no major changes to the document with the exception of an addition in respect of IT risk in light of the recent cyber-attack on UH systems.

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 Wednesday, 24th February at 4.00 pm.

4. CEO Update

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

- The KPI dashboard. She highlighted the positive progress against all Board KPIs which are proving to be resilient despite the pandemic. She took Trustees through the fine detail of each KPI across the four Strategic Themes.
- Operational update. She drew the Board's attention to:
 - HSU have worked with UH's Widening Access and Student Success team to submit a student-written submission against UH's Access and Participation Plan. RH flagged the positive and constructive nature of the process.
 - BAME Student Journey Research. This is a three-strand research project focusing on Wellbeing, Academic Interests and the Awarding Gap. Work is well underway with reporting due imminently.
 - Forum renaming project. The HSU spaces within the Forum will be renamed after student consultation and collaboration between HSU and UH Marketing departments. The Style Bar will be renamed '77' after 1977 which was the year HSU was founded and the Attic space will be renamed 'The Loft' which was chosen to reflect the heritage of the Attic. RH confirmed to KB that the names are planned to remain for as long as the spaces are in use.
 - Recruitment is underway for a Student Voice Manager following the Manager's promotion to the Senior Leadership Team.
 - 360 appraisals are underway for the junior staff team.
 - Confirmation has been received from NUS that Part A of the two-part Quality Students' Union accreditation was accepted, with work now underway on Part B. The accreditation looks at various procedures that HSU undertakes around themes such as student involvement, strategy, relationship management etc.
- Elections. RH asked the Board to note the successful election of four new Sabbatical Officers for 2021-22:
 - Rhiannon Ellis, President
 - Junaid Ahmed, VP Activities
 - Prosasti Ganguly, VP Community
 - Zara Haram Syeda, VP Education
- Forum redevelopment. The project is on track and will be handed over on 9th August 2021, with a provisional grand opening in September 2021 in line with Government guidance at the time.
- Cyber incident. UH experienced a cyber-attack in mid-April. UH systems for staff and students were significantly impacted. RH asked the Board to note that while HSU uses UH systems for Office 365 products and the network, other business systems are managed by external organisations and currently, HSU is largely cloud-based. To that end, HSU were largely unimpacted by the incident but the issue of IT systems has been added to the Risk Register in order for mitigations to be considered.

DB thanked RH for the comprehensive review.

5. Sabbatical Officer updates

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer updates which reviewed their finished projects and tasks, those in process and to be completed during their remaining weeks in office.

SF asked the Officers if there were issues that the team were disappointed that they had not been able to undertake during their time in office. KM replied for the team and said that although there were undoubtedly issues they would have liked to have covered, she felt that the Officers had prioritised and focused on projects that were not only time critical but that had been likely to have the greatest impact. Given the pandemic, KM went on to say that the Officer manifestos had absolutely needed to be adapted. DB and SF both said they thought the team had adapted very well to the difficulties of the past year and in response to SI, DB suggested that the Officers might like to reflect on the year under the impact of Covid-19 for the benefit of the new incoming Officer team. DB thanked the Officers for their huge effort and the hard work undertaken this year.

6. University Update

MW updated the Board as follows:

- Return of students to campus. There is still no further news as to whether more students can return to campus from 17th May 2021 despite significant lobbying from the Vice-Chancellor and his team to central Government but MW said she was hopeful that some students would be allowed to return on or after this date. However, she noted that it feels anomalous that, nationally, large groups will be able to meet socially from this date while students cannot meet in classrooms. This means that even if students can return from 17th May, it is a disappointing position for undergraduates as w/c 10th May is their last teaching week.
- Next academic year. MW said that UH is planning and timetabling for smaller class sizes next academic year to allow for social distancing if room capacity limits are imposed. She highlighted the significant pressure this places on teaching staff as it does not allow for the same quantity of face-to-face teaching as UH would like. While the online teaching experience can almost be better educationally, it of course omits the social interaction students need. MW said that UH must focus on social confidence and competence as much as digital confidence and competence for all students, and particularly for those new students arriving in September.
- Student voice. Sabbatical Officers' priorities will continue to be shared from September at the Education and Student Experience Planning Committee so the 'student voice' will continue to be heard at one of the three key UH Committees.
- Cyber-attack. On 14th April 2021, UH experienced a significant cyber-attack. This did not disable personal emails and access but rather disabled a significant number of student records style software such as data held on fees, loans payments, applications for significant academic deferrals/extensions etc. Because of the impact on students and to avoid pressure on central services, UH agreed that all students that had assessments due between 14th and 28th April would be given an automatic five-day extension for submission rather than students applying for individual extensions. There are still some students who are experiencing difficulty in accessing specialist software applications, particularly in Creative Arts, but there is also further flexibility for staff to negotiate submission dates outside of the normal timetable. Some practical assessments did continue to go ahead during the period. MW met with the Student PVC Advisory Group as these mitigations were agreed so that they were able to field enquiries and support implementation.

DB said that UH had indeed been most flexible around submission dates and he noted how gratefully this had been received. He also concurred with the disappointment surrounding the return of students to campus.

7. March 2021 Management Accounts, Year-end Forecast and Balance Sheet (papers 2a-2c)

LP updated the Board as follows:

- Total income for March was above budget primarily due to staff shortages with the Head of Operations position vacant and associated costs of wages were removed. Two staff in Commercial are also still on part-time furlough.
- All three departments within Commercial saved on actual spend due to the expected return of student staff in March which did not materialise.
- Three staff in Admin (two from Finance and one from HR) are on part-time furlough leading to a reduction in wages.
- A credit from the insurance company has been received due to the assets sold earlier in the year no longer needing cover for £1,300.
- In summary, actual spend for all departments is showing £11,742 less than budgeted for at this time of year. With the Commercial department showing a loss of £2,623 instead of £10,447, the difference has contributed to the show of extra income on the account summary. This has turned the budgeted loss of £5,523 into a surplus this month of £14,042.
- The actual surplus year to date is £79,154 compared to a budgeted deficit of £39,669. This is an improvement of £118,823.
- At year end, the forecast surplus is £5,669.
- To keep the forecast as intended, HSU have estimated the sum of £45k will be reinvested back into students and staff. This spending has been discussed at the Finance and Audit Committee and will be allocated to the Buddy Scheme. However, HSU will also be liable for Stamp Duty when it takes over the lease of the Forum so some funds will be held back to cover those costs.

RH drew the Board's attention to the Balance Sheet. She highlighted a difference of £40k in terms of total fixed assets between March 2020 and March 2021. This is largely due to the sale of assets when old equipment was moved out of the Forum. She also highlighted that Net Funds as at March 2021 stand at £363k compared to £261k as at March 2020. This is largely driven by the sale of assets and the surplus from last year.

DB commented on the encouraging 'state of play' and commended the team on the good finance management. He also said that he was very glad that monies were being put back into student programmes. He went on to stress that HSU is not looking to make excess profits in any one year but contingency funds are always required in the background.

8. 2021-22 Budget (papers 3a and 3b)

DB noted that the Budget Planning Round is currently underway with the review meeting with UH scheduled for 19th May 2021.

RH has spoken to UH's Secretary and Registrar who has indicated that the Subvention Grant is likely to 'hold steady'. RH has requested a small uplift for staff salary increases.

Two Budget scenarios have been put forward:

- an assumption that the Forum opens in September 2021. The model used for the Forum here is one that covers its own costs and delivers a small surplus, from between £20-35k to HSU. These monies are used to provide an additional member of the Finance team who provides financial support to the Forum activities.
- a second scenario assumes that the Forum opens in January 2022. This budget suggests there will be a small loss, without income coming in through the Autumn.

DB said he felt that two Budget scenarios was a sensible plan of action given the uncertainty surrounding the progress of the pandemic. At the next meeting of the Board of Trustees in June, DB and RH will report back on UH's final decision.

9. Elections Review Working Group

RH reported that despite outreach and communication efforts to a variety of underrepresented groups, HSU is still failing to attract a broad demographic of students to stand for election for Sabbatical Officer roles. HSU also want to ensure that support is available to students who are interested in roles, regardless of background, to ensure the process is as free, fair and inclusive as possible. A Working Group comprising of DB as Chair and representative for External Trustees, SR as a representative for Sabbatical Officers, two School Community Organisers, LP, RH, SO and a member of the Student Activities team has been set up to consider:

- how other Student Unions operate in this area
- to incorporate feedback from UH to better understand what UH would like in terms of student representation and how HSU can make sure they are adequately representing the 'student voice'
- and student feedback, particularly from non- voting students.

DB noted that recommendations should be ready for the next meeting of the Board of Trustees in June with a view to having any changes to procedure in place for the election cycle in 2022.

10. Finance and Audit Committee update

SF reported to Trustees on the recent meeting of the Committee, thanking LP for her work on updating HSU policies. She also thanked KM and BS for their efforts on the plans for student welfare spending. She went on to note that she was looking forward to seeing which Budget scenario was 'green-lighted'.

11. Remuneration and Appointments Committee update

DB noted that the appointment of the new Head of Operations, who is now in post, has been the primary focus for the Committee. He noted that the two Student Trustees will complete their terms of office at the close of this academic year and as such, the Committee is now in the process of recruiting to those two vacancies over the course of the next few weeks. Finally, DB highlighted that in light of the improved budgetary position, it has been possible to give all staff a small cost-of-living uplift. RH replied that she had some very positive feedback from staff about the salary uplift so she extended her thanks to the Committee for this action.

12. AOB

LP reported that HSU has achieved accreditation for its Investors in Diversity for Small Businesses Award from the National Diversity Centre. The process had involved sending out surveys to external users, students and to staff to comment on HSU practices with results analysed by the National Diversity Centre. The accreditation is awarded for two years and will therefore run until March 2023. However, HSU is now working with a consultant who is analysing the results and data in order to build an action plan for implementation. This will be overseen by an HSU Working Group. The consultant will report to Trustees at a future Board meeting in the Autumn. DB congratulated LP on the Award.

DB asked Trustees to let him or RH know if the current timings of Board Meetings (ie at 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm) were still convenient for Board Meetings as the dates for the next academic year are soon to be confirmed.

Meeting closed at 5.50 pm.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, 23rd June – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

- Dates for academic year 2021/22:
 - Friday, 17th September 2021 – 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm (half-day Development Day)
 - Wednesday, 27th October 2021 – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm
 - 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
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