



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting  
Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022 via MS Teams**

**Present:**

- David Ball (DB)
- Rhiannon Ellis (RE)
- Ahmer Ilyas (AI)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Md Sajal (MS)
- Osama Siddiqui (OS)
- Aman Tripathi (AT)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

**In attendance:**

- Sean Ferrie, *Head of Operations, HSU (SFe)*
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU (RH)*
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU (SO)*
- Leena Patel, *Head of People and Resources, HSU (LP)*
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU (KM)*

**1. Apologies for absence**

Sarah Fuell

**Non-Attendance**

None

**Welcome**

DB welcomed all Trustees to the meeting. DB said that RE had been due to Chair the meeting but due to illness amongst the Sabbatical Officer team, he would in fact be Chairing the meeting today.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

None noted.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting which was held on Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

#### **4. September Financial update**

DB reminded the Board that as of today, just two weeks into the term, information is provisional and can provide only a brief snapshot, with detailed reporting to follow in due course. LP highlighted the following:

- There were key differences between 2021 and 2022, namely that trading had been closed for just over a year as the 2021 academic year commenced. As a result, a very conservative budget was set but in respect of the 2022 budget, the Finance team had more insight.
- Trading was £15.6k higher than budgeted on net ticket income this year so far but £4.6k lower than last year.
- The sale of wristbands is currently £2.3k higher than last year. LP noted that the team had increased the price of wristbands by £1 which had impacted sales.
- In terms of wet sales, sales are at £6.9k, up against budget, but £24k lower than last year.
- Even though ticket and wristband sales were higher than last year, it appears that not everyone who bought a ticket attended events which in turn affected wet sales and bar spend. Wristbands gave access to all events but allowed students to 'pick and choose' when they attended. DB said that it was disappointing that students did not want to attend some of the events. In response to UM, LP said that the wristbands are priced at £49 and that the Officer team had played a big part in driving sales this year. RH went on to say that it is generally parents that buy the wristbands for their children as part of their joining the university but that students had not wanted to fund the alcohol purchases which became the barrier to going out. Attendance usually varies across the nights with drop-off at anywhere between 10-30%. She said that lower spend per head sits against last year's artificially high spend per head which had been a response to coming out of Lockdown. However, this year's reduction in spend appears to be the knock-on from the cost-of-living crisis. In response to SI, RH replied that the increase in the price of the wristband was driven by rising costs across all areas including student staffing, alcohol and costs of acts. Utility bills for the venue are not paid by HSU but are included in the commercial lease that is in turn funded by UH so were not taken into account.

DB reiterated the provisional nature of the data. He said that at the next meeting of the Board in November more data can be shared and last year's audited accounts will also be available and will offer a better comparison.

#### **5. CEO Update**

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

- The Advice and Support Centre, for the first time, supported more than 2k students within the 2021-22 academic year. The nature of the casework is changing with the bulk of support now around financial issues. RH noted that the staff capacity has been increased for the Centre.
- Further to the last meeting, work around the cost-of-living crisis has progressed and a series of recommendations have been made between UH and HSU about how they can jointly support students through this time. Final recommendations will be shared once agreed. International student hardship support is particularly needed and will feature as well as additional support measures for students.
- Working jointly with colleagues from UH's Academic Quality unit, HSU is looking at how the student voice is heard and responded to across UH. There are a number of strands

including digital capacity, staff interaction with students and response times. This work is progressing well and is expected to be completed at the start of 2023. It will be fed back to the Board as it progresses.

- Following a number of staff vacancies across multiple teams, nearly all outstanding permanent staff vacancies have been appointed. Onboarding for new staff is under way.
- Along with a number of SUs, HSU have engaged Warner Goodman, a firm of employment solicitors, in an annual service known as 'Peace of Mind'. Aimed at providing additional, low-cost HR resource, the service provides unlimited employment law advice and annual policy and contract reviews.

## **6. Start of Term update**

The Board received an update on the start of term. Highlights of the discussion included:

- There has been a good start to term in respect of societies up to 919 individual members and 2,521 total memberships compared to 2017 which was the last year with comparable membership structure. 236 memberships were sold at the Welcome Fair. Training and development for committees is underway and 'Give it a go' events are also running.
- Contacts with the Advice and Support Centre are about 30% down this September compared to last year but this is unlikely to continue given the increase in student numbers. The complexity of casework has increased. SO highlighted the overrepresentation of international students from a BAME background using the service. The biggest issue for students at the moment coming through in casework is academic appeals.
- The Skills Development Programme is underway, offering a training programme made up of a series of workshops and this is now available to all students.
- International Welcome Week took place w/c 19<sup>th</sup> September. Anecdotal feedback has been very positive. A 'Taste of Britain' event introduced students to British culture.
- Welcome Week with Home students on campus had at least one event being held every day to not only promote HSU but to offer a 'buzz' and a comfortable space within which to make friends. All events were free and this saw some big successes with the number of students attending. 'Hello Fest' took place on 25<sup>th</sup> September and welcomed students to a daytime festival on the last day of 'Move In Weekend'. The Welcome Fair on 30<sup>th</sup> September saw over 6k students scanned in and was attended by local businesses, charities and organisations. This event generated over £12k and feedback has been very positive. SFe highlighted, in particular, the hard work of the Manager who coordinated the event, who had been without many supporting staff to assist in running the event as vacancies had yet to be filled at that time. He thanked the HSU team wholeheartedly for their endeavours.
- The team ran 9 events in The Forum out of the first 10 nights of term. Ticket sales had been slow but good last-minute attendance figures came through. Around 900 students averaged for each event against 1,200 capacity. Feedback about events has been good. There were a few minor incidents but these were handled well operationally by the team.

DB thanked SO and SFe for the update. On behalf of the Board, he thanked the HSU staff involved in all the events for their enormous hard work and commitment, particularly given the national events that had overshadowed the start of term and with less than a full team complement.

## **7. Sabbatical Officer Report**

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer Report. DB said that given the illness amongst the

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Officer team today, there would not be any verbal reports. DB asked if Trustees could raise any queries coming out of their updates directly with him and he will revert having consulted the team.

## 8. University update

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

- Start of term. Feedback has been received by the UH senior team daily and this has allowed the university to keep on top of the challenges involved in welcoming 33k to campus. The Registration period has been extended to 17<sup>th</sup> October because it has been difficult to administer the number of students with the current staffing profile, recruitment having been challenging. A review of Semester A and a look forward to arrangements for Semester B, which welcomes a further 5k students, is underway. MW said that she was impressed with the engagement and interest taken by the Sabbatical Officers this year in her areas of the portfolio.
- Cost-of-living crisis. Across UH and HSU, a team has been working collaboratively to put forward a proposal to take forward to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. Pre-pandemic, there was approximately £250k in the Hardship Fund which swelled slightly during the pandemic due to Government funding but this was reduced to under £100k as the nation exited the Lockdowns etc. As a result of the proposal and a genuine willingness from the Vice-Chancellor and the Executive to ensure UH's students did not suffer from the cost-of-living crisis, the Hardship Fund has now been increased to £500k. This will be revisited if it proves inadequate. As a result, a team will be working out how the Fund will be administered in the most equitable way when needs present. MW said she was very grateful to HSU for the lobbying they undertook as she said she did not believe that the message would have been received so powerfully without their input.
- Structure around academic skills support. MW said that she would be working with the Sabbatical Officer team to make sure that the proposals feeding into the business planning round this year are fit for purpose. A consultancy report has already been received and additional support is in the process of being appointed in the run up to Christmas to help define and design the university offer.
- Priorities for the academic year in Education and Student Experience (in addition to academic skills support and how the student voice is heard and responded to, as previously discussed):
  - Maintain the progress on the BAME Awarding Gap and continue to close the gap.
  - Continuing the success in the NSS and PTes. UH have committed to exceeding or maintaining current performance.
  - TEF Submission. The metrics that will underpin the TEF have now been received. MW said that the university is likely to achieve a Silver award, with the written submission having the potential for UH to achieve a Gold award.
  - Continue with progress in rolling-out Herts Learning, the whole institution transformation process in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. It is a three-year process, currently in its second year, and students will start to see an impact on that from this academic year.
  - To instigate and conclude a review of the wider student experience including looking at Go Herts and the way that fits within the student portfolio.
- OFSTED are currently on campus inspecting apprenticeship provision.

DB thanked MW for her update and said, as ever, how much the Board appreciated her feedback giving, as it does, such a perspective on UH's thinking and how HSU dovetails with that.

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UM asked if plans to distribute allocations of the Hardship Fund would be shared with the Trustee Board as to progress. MW said that the Fund will be managed by a new working group which will report in across the university but that she would also be very happy to report into the HSU Trustee Board. RH said that this would be very welcome. MW said that the priority is to consider the criteria for the distribution of the funds. She noted that the main issue was looking at ways of reforming how access to the Fund for students can be considered and whether separate funds needed to be set aside for more urgent and immediate access. MW suggested, therefore, that reporting could be added as a separate item to future Trustee Board agendas given the pressing and developing nature of the issue. Both RH and RE agreed, RH noting the cross-institutional nature of the work on this project.

#### **9. Update to Articles of Association**

The Board received the schedule of changes in respect of the Articles of Association. The suggested update asks that the Articles are amended to reflect that Annual Members' Meetings and Trustee Board meetings can be held online as well as face-to-face. This was agreed by the Board.

#### **10. Officer accountability proposal**

DB reminded the Board that the Sabbatical Officer team are asked to report back to Trustees at each meeting. Last year, there was considerable discussion as to whether this really supported the Officers in their objectives and gave Trustees the information that was needed. As a result, a new plan has been proposed as to how HSU might better understand the work and progress of the Officers and how HSU might respond to the report in a supportive and constructive way.

RE took the Board through the proposal, highlighting the desire for a new way to be found to hold the Officer team to account given that they hold elected positions. The proposal is to pair each Elected Officer with a group of School Community Organisers (SCOs), senior student leaders across all seven Schools, to encourage direct communication. The SCOs would then be asked to offer feedback every month which, in turn, will feed into a Board sub-Committee allowing Trustees to have insight into views of the student body.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- DB said that he felt that working with the influential body that is the SCO community would be a good way for the Board to hear back from students, and then any help and support required will come from that. He went on to say that a sub-Committee, able to give a summary report to the Board, is an effective and efficient way forward. He thanked RE for her thoughtful and considered plan.
- In response to AT, RE noted that SCOs would not be involved in the appraisal process for Officers but that they would complete the suggested monthly feedback. DB stressed that this plan will be established as an entirely supportive process. He noted that the Board does not currently hear the student voice as to how the Officer team's priorities are progressing and so this plan will give an idea on progress, undoubtedly mainly positive, but if it does throw up any areas where there are concerns then that will provide RH and the staff team with the opportunity to put in any support as necessary. The role of the Elected Officer is developmental and the function of the sub-Committee will be to support that learning process and to celebrate successes. DB noted that the Student Council will not be involved at this stage. He highlighted that the role of the sub-Committee is solely for the

purposes of the HSU Trustee Board to consider how the Officer team are progressing towards stated targets.

- UM said that he was impressed with the work when reviewing the proposal. He said, however, that he felt that the sample questions to be considered by the SCOs and fed back to the Board were somewhat subjective. He asked if there were key metrics that could be developed by the sub-Committee that could sit alongside the more subjective questions providing the commentary. RE replied that the Sabbatical team have individual Action Plans set at the beginning of the academic year and these could offer necessary metrics to measure against. DB agreed that this area was something that needed some further work and thanked UM for his input. RH went on to say that the Head of Student Services would be involved and would moderate the feedback and compilation of the reports because inevitably student to student feedback and accountability can involve personal feelings and relationships.
- SI said that he was now clearer as to what was driving the need for this process and he thanked RE and RH for their clarification. He asked, however, how the Sabbatical Officers had interacted with the SCOs previously. RE replied that in previous years SCOs have been paired with Officers, with this changing every year. For this academic year, good working relationships are already being developed with each Officer having been paired with at least one SCO per School to ensure a wider spread of contact with whom they are in regular communication. DB said that if any feedback comes from the SCOs, either good or bad, it is received in a rather haphazard fashion currently or not at all and thus, this proposal formalises this process whilst encouraging a better flow of communication in both directions. RH said there had always been the opportunity for SCOs to offer feedback as part of the Student Council, the student accountability forum for Officers, but it has never been received directly by the Board of Trustees. She went on to say that any Board should understand how the resource that is the Officer team is functioning and this proposal is to 'close that loop'. SI said that he recognised that the overarching tenor is positive and supportive but he noted that he wasn't entirely sure as to why there was a need for a sub-Committee and why feedback couldn't be supplied directly to the full Board. DB replied that the amount of work involved is such that a subset of the main Board is required to organise it to ensure that Trustees can receive data in a fashion that is informative. He said he hoped a smaller group would offer focus.
- DB drew the Board's attention to the proposed membership of the sub-Committee. He said that it was not yet appropriate to finalise the membership but this would be confirmed in due course as the paper is refined. DB suggested that the final details of the proposal will be circulated outside the Board Meeting cycle via email.

#### **11. AOB**

In response to UM, RH said that work on the next iteration of the Strategic Plan would commence from January 2023.

Meeting closed at 4.45 pm.

**Next Meeting: Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> November 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm (venue tbc)**

**Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> February – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm**

**Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> May – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm**

**Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> June – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm**