



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting  
Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024 on campus and via MS Teams**

**Present:**

- Dr Lucy Atkinson (LA)
- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Olawale Joshua Komolafe (OJK)
- Temitope Idowu (TI)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Manoj Kumar Nagireddy (MKN)
- Moyinoluwa Olaiya (MO)
- Oluronke Oluwalere (OO)
- Rajiv Sudan (RS)
- Bob Walder (BW)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

**In attendance:**

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Steve Owen, *Head of Student Services, HSU* (SO)
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)

**1. Apologies for absence**

- Sean Ferrie
- Leena Patel

**Non-Attendance**

None

**Welcome**

BW welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the new Officer attendees.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

None noted.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting and actions arising**

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meeting, which was held on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

Signed ..... Dated .....

BW and RH provided updates on actions arising from the minutes of the last meeting:

- Forum accommodation grant from the University. Confirmation that the Forum grant income should be passed onto Enterprises has now been written into HSU's Memorandum of Understanding with UH.
- Defined benefit pension provision. Godfrey Wilson provided a briefing document on this issue and on the Audit findings which was presented at UH's Audit and Risk Committee, and accepted.
- Historic creditor. Legal advice has been sought in respect of the contractual debt owed to the promoter and suggests that incorporating the money back into HSU is likely to be relatively low risk. However, further formal legal advice can be sought for a fee in the region of £500-1,000. RH asked the Board for their thoughts. RS asked what plans there were for the sum if reincorporated. RH replied that there was certainly merit in reallocating these funds and this should be discussed at the Finance and Audit Risk Committee. RH confirmed to UM that the monies had not been retained in an interest-bearing account, but he suggested that the interest should be quantified over the retention period. Both RS and UM said they did not feel it was worth additional expenditure for further legal advice which Trustees concurred with. BW went on to say that on balance this was a low risk, well within Reserves, and noted the Board's preference not to incur further costs on more formal legal advice.

RH/Luci  
Ablett

#### 4. Semester A impact overview

The Board received the Semester A impact overview. RH noted HSU's ambitious target of engaging 100% of students with 100% satisfaction and in response to this, HSU managers presented how progress had been made against this objective through Semester A in each of their respective areas. Each presentation shared information on levels of engagement, successes, challenges and future plans.

*Stephanie Keegan (SK), Assistant Advice Manager, Advice and Support Team*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- RS asked whether the Peer Advisor roles were paid or voluntary. SK replied that these roles are paid, and incumbents are already staff working as Welcome Desk and Community Events Assistants, who have been vetted and interviewed previously.
- RS went on to ask about the volume of students who had been consulted in the Centre's satisfaction data. SK replied that this was a considerable number, proactively tracked through the case management system.
- In response to RH, SK said that the top presenting issues from students are finance and housing related, academic misconduct and appeals.
- LA asked if it would be possible, for better reporting, to break the demographic of Postgraduate students into Taught and PhD as they are two separate groups and often with a disconnect from the SU. SK said this would be possible and she would forward the relevant data.
- OO thanked SK and the team for their positive support to students.

*Jessi Gonzalez (JG), Community Events Manager*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- In response to TI, JG said that her team always try to integrate events into the student journey when students are already on campus, working closely with the Timetabling team, setting up drop-in events and using areas at peak times. RH added that the team

very much focused on making sure that the diversity of the student population is catered for in the variety of events offered.

- MKN congratulated the team on the warm welcome and success of Freshers Week.
- MKN went on to ask about the provision of daytime events. JG said the team are focusing on a rebranded Thursday Break in Semester B as the regular daytime event which proved popular last year.
- In response to OJK, RH said HSU focus on targeted intervention for societies, working with groups to set expectations for numbers and events.
- TI said it would be beneficial for marketing to be as broad as possible to contribute to the success of events and RH suggested that this is discussed directly with the Marketing Manager and her team.

*Jon Constantine (JC), Operations Manager*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- RS asked if events were solely predicated on profit. JC replied that his focus is on whether events are commercially viable even at breakeven, but that the team always work together to try to accommodate events to meet the needs of all student demographics.
- OJK asked if it was possible to run two events at the Forum simultaneously. JC said that the team have tried to do this previously as it makes commercial sense. However, because the spaces are perceived differently, students are often negative about not being accommodated in the main Club space.
- OJK went on to ask if it was possible to make tickets cheaper. JC replied that this would inevitably cause a hit to income elsewhere and inevitably, bar prices would therefore have to rise to cover the shortfall.
- In response to MKN, JC said that the team have experimented with free entry before 10.30 pm and there is no footfall.

*Luci Ablett (LA), Finance Manager*

LA updated the Board as follows on the current financial position and further discussion was carried forward to the Agenda item under December 2023 Management Accounts:

- YTD surplus is £10,183 compared to a budget deficit of £19,790.
- HSU are forecasting to end the year with a surplus of £28,215.

*Arub Abbas (AA), Insight Co-ordinator*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- RS asked how research projects are decided upon. AA replied that projects come out of Board and strategic goals, as well as through arising issues brought by students and the SLT. SO noted that the scale of projects can vary considerably.

*Samy Gibson (SG), Marketing Manager*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- In response to UM, SG said that targeted communications had gone very well this semester, particularly email campaigns, which may be due to a more mature student demographic who are generally more responsive to email and less active on social media.

*Lizzie Kiely (LK), Opportunities Manager*

Highlights of the subsequent discussion:

- UM asked if a report on the outcome of the auto-enrolment to societies project could come back to the Board at a later date. LK and RH both agreed and said this would be possible within the next twelve months.

**5. December Management Accounts**

The Board received the December Management Accounts. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked that with a predicted loss for the month now a positive, whether this was due to increased private hire of the Forum. RH noted that there have been staff savings but that the team have been pushing hard on private hire of the Forum, recognising that student uptake on formal activities is down and will continue to be so. Private hire is one of the areas where the team are optimistic they will be able to make up some of this shortfall. RH confirmed that requisite due diligence and reputational risk is considered before any private hire is confirmed.

**6. CEO update**

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

- Southern SUs Conference. HSU are part of a regional network of 19 Southern SUs and will be hosting the next Conference later in the month. These events, which are an opportunity to share best practice and collaborate, have been going for a number of years and it is HSU's turn to host. One of the key features of the Conference will be discussion about the revised Officer model for which HSU is unique in the sector.
- HSU Staff Development Month. This focused initiative on staff development, enhancing skills and knowledge via LinkedIn Learning, has just completed. RH noted its success and that staff have requested that this takes place twice yearly if possible.

**7. Elected Officer update**

The Board received the update paper and Action Plans from the Elected Officer team.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked if it would be possible for External Trustees to be invited to key events. RH said that this would absolutely be possible, and her team would action.
- BW thanked MKN for his report on behalf of the Officer team. He said he admired the incredibly positive and practical list of projects the team are working on. RH concurred and said she was so impressed with the team's contributions and how all Officers have balanced their responsibilities with their studies.

RH

**8. University update**

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

- Pro Vice-Chancellor Education and Student Experience. A new appointee has joined from the University of West London who took up the role on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024. MW said that she hopes the new Pro Vice-Chancellor will join a Board of Trustees meeting in the near future to introduce herself.

- Student registration. UH have enrolled 4,027 in Semester B with another 1,300 to complete the enrolment process. There have been some visa delays, and the registration date has been extended.
- Semester A. The 'equal consideration' deadline for undergraduate UCAS applications has now passed and it appears undergraduate applications to UH are up by 2% which is very positive and places UH ahead of competitors and the sector. MW said that the work HSU is undertaking to make sure students are well represented during their time at UH, so that any improvements make a difference to the student experience, are beginning to show. Postgraduate recruitment will be known by the end of March 2024 and MW said she will update the Board at that time. Changes to the Government policy regarding visas will impact recruitment but UH's position in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) will remain a 'pull' factor.
- National Student Survey (NSS) 2024. The survey opened on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024, running to 30<sup>th</sup> February 2024. MW thanked MKN for helping to promote the survey and also extended her thanks to the SCOs for their support with the roll-out.
- Graduations. 15 graduations commence w/c 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at St Albans Cathedral.
- School of Physics, Engineering and Computer Science (Spectra) building. This is nearing completion with fit-out starting in March 2024, before an official opening in September 2024.

BW thanked MW very much for her most valuable insights as always.

**9. People Committee update**

UM, as Chair, updated the Board following the first meeting of the year for the People Committee. Firstly, Officer remuneration was discussed, and a recommendation was approved to increase in line with other competitor universities from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024. Secondly, LP had been working with external lawyers to review how HSU's sick pay married up to common practice. The Committee accepted a recommendation to reduce sick pay entitlement on a rolling basis for new hires.

**10. Green Impact Initiative update**

The Board received a briefing paper on the Green Impact initiative. LP is strategic lead for this project and in her absence, Trustees asked for an update to be presented at the next meeting of the Board.

**11. Annual Statement of Legal Compliance**

The Board received and were asked to note the Annual Statement of Legal Compliance 2023-24 which ensures that HSU has applied its processes and internal systems of control in a manner that gives satisfaction to various legal requirements. BW asked the Board to note the complexity of the legal and compliance framework. UM said that for the next iteration it would be useful to note who the responsible individual was for each requirement.

LP (post meeting not – LP not available for March meeting, item deferred

RH

**12. AOB**

- TI raised the issue of timetabling, whereby for many students lectures are spread out across the week, reducing their opportunities to take on part-time work which is so important in the current cost-of-living crisis. He asked if consideration could be given to condensing lectures into concentrated blocks across the week. RH said that this was very much an issue and that she and MKN discuss frequently, both representatives in the UH forum on timetabling, as there is a breadth of student views on this. MKN said that he had spent time with the Timetabling team and noted the incredible complexity in the process. MW said that it was important to consider the breadth of views on this, but she was very aware that, since the pandemic, 80-90% of students have a part-time job. She said that this fact was absolutely front and centre of every planning discussion being undertaken across UH and was very much part of the commitment to the timetable being condensed to no more than three days for the majority of students. Some courses, however, will require heavier access to specialist space over a longer period of time, but these are likely to be students who are not working, but with placements embedded or other professional responsibilities. MW said that Trustees should be guaranteed that this issue sat at the heart of discussions about the timetable for this year and going forward into the next academic year. She suggested that a report is run on the number of students whose timetables are already over three days, or fewer, which might provide some reassurance. RH also said it would be fruitful for the Officer team to spend some time with the Timetabling team for a briefing.
- BW thanked SO wholeheartedly for his commitment and contribution to HSU in advance of his leaving to take up a new post. SO thanked Trustees, past and present, for their support and said the exposure to the business of the Trustee Board had been immensely enjoyable and valuable. On behalf of the Board, BW wished him every success in the future.

RH/MKN

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

**Next Meeting: Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2024 at 4.00 pm (venue tbc)**

*Dates for 2023/24 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm:*

*Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> May 2024*

*Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024*