



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 8th February 2023 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- David Ball (DB)
- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Sarah Fuell (SF)
- Steve Isaacs (SI)
- Ahmer Ilyas (AI)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Md Sajal (MS)
- Osama Siddiqui (OS)
- Aman Tripathi (AT)
- Dr Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Sean Ferrie, *Head of Operations, HSU* (SFe)
- 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

None

Non-Attendance

None

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 Wednesday, 9th November 2022. It was noted that there is one amendment to make to reflect SF's attendance which was omitted.

The Board of Trustees also approved the minutes of the emergency meetings, which were held on Thursday, 15th and Monday, 19th December 2022.

Matters arising

As reported in November's Minutes, DB noted that a Scrutiny Committee had been planned for Sabbatical Officer accountability. However, in light of the changes in respect of the Election cycle and make-up of the Officer team, it has been decided not to proceed currently. Once the new system is in place, this proposal will be revisited.

RH confirmed that she and UM were yet to further their discussion in respect of business continuity issues, although this will be reported on in the next iteration of the Risk Register.

4. Proposal of Deputy Chair arrangements for the last three meetings of the year and Confirmation of Student Governor

DB noted that as the current President, HSU, has now left the organisation, this leaves the positions of Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board and Student Governor vacant. Following discussions between UH and HSU, it has been agreed that AT would be approached to be Student Governor and he has very kindly agreed to take on the role. In respect of Deputy Chair, with three meetings to run until the end of the academic year, it has been decided that the position will rotate amongst the three Vice-Presidents, if required. Elections, in due course, will allow the Board to revert to usual arrangements. Trustees unanimously confirmed their approval of these appointments.

5. CEO Update

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

- Cost of living additional funding has been secured for Semester B. There is now a quicker access hardship fund (open to home and international students) and the doubling of international student hardship funding levels. RH highlighted the three guiding principles of spending that have been identified. She noted sincere thanks to the Student Finance team who have been very proactive in their support with these initiatives. DB said that it was good to see that much of the data collated in the research work undertaken by the former President and current Officer team had been included and that it had been influential in achieving necessary approvals.
- RH presented the Advice and Support Centre Semester A overview. She noted that numbers were holding steady, although with an increasing complexity in casework. Key issues across the term included tuition fee debt, academic appeals and course withdrawal. DB asked that the Board's thanks be passed back to the team for their hard work and endeavours in supporting students.
- The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) student submission has now been completed. UH's feedback has been positive. HSU were also part of UH's TEF submission group which has been a very positive, collaborative experience.
- The National Student Survey, open to final year undergraduate students, opened on 6th February. AT and MW collaborated on student communications to promote the survey. The HSU question changed this year (now asking 'how well' representation is undertaken and measured on a four-point scale) and RH will feed back to the Board once data has been received.
- January has started positively against budget.
- Herts welcomed more than 4,000 students in Semester B and the team provided a series of

events and activities to support their inductions. Highlights included a Re-freshers Fair and a One World Event attended by 200 students.

- HSU have met with UH's JSoc and a representative from the Union of Jewish Students to go through feedback from NUS's antisemitism investigation. Trustees will be updated fully later in today's meeting.
- Nominations for Elections open on 20th February at noon and close on 13th March at noon. Voting runs from 27th-29th March (8 am – 6 pm) with results available the evening of 31st March. NUS will be the Returning Officer. Trustees will be updated fully later in today's meeting.

6. December Management Accounts

The Board received the Management Accounts for December. LP highlighted the following:

- Commercial income was lower than expected compared to budget. YTD income shows £49,999 which is £8,932 less than budget. Bar sales are down by 19% compared to budget but ticket sales are up. Although tickets are being purchased, students are not spending so much in the venue.
- All departments are underspending and for December, expenses were down 17%. YTD underspend was 24% compared to budget. A new Research department is being recruited for. Although a manager has not yet been recruited, a staff member has been hired but this has left salary savings within this department. Other staff vacancies elsewhere are also creating savings.
- Overall, December is showing a deficit of £829, compared to a budgeted deficit of £6k. YTD is showing a surplus of £68,889 compared to budget of £36,045.
- From January, more frequent and accurate forecasting will be possible.

DB said that it appeared that finances remain in a 'healthy' position which always allows resources to be diverted to activities that could not otherwise be funded towards the end of the year.

DB asked SFe to offer some further clarity in respect of the downturn in student spend. SFe said that it had been a positive start to Semester B but that the team were being realistic about how long this would last and how much spend students would continue to have. He noted that expenditure is being closely monitored to reduce costs wherever possible. DB said that the Board recognised the efforts being put in on the Commercial side given the difficult trading environment.

UM asked LP for some further information in respect of staff vacancies. LP replied that the key vacancy unfilled is the Insight and Policy Manager, vacant since September. Direct recruitment has not been successful, and LP has been working with a recruitment agency. She said that the issue appears to centre on salary, alongside the style of working, requiring the incumbent to be visible and student-facing in the office rather than working remotely. It was originally anticipated to recruit for a manager for the department, who would then in turn hire the team, but a new member of the team, recently appointed, now fulfils a role which is working at a higher level than Co-ordinator, so she is able to offer good support. Vacancies elsewhere are being filled and there are currently only three open vacancies.

7. Sabbatical Officer report

The Board received the Sabbatical Officer report. DB noted that the relevant paper from each VP would be circulated in due course.

Signed Dated

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- SF asked MS if he could elaborate on the part-time job support he is offering students. MS replied that he has been working with seven students, signposting them to the UH Careers service, assisting with preparation of CVs and finding vacancies, while supporting those students for whom English is not their first language in many communications. SF congratulated him on the initiative and said she felt there were further discussions to have around this issue. DB concurred, noting that UH does provide a professional careers and employment service. However, he said that he felt that there potentially might be other ways to support students in this area, without direct support from a VP, and that this would be worth exploring. RH said that the UH Careers team have proactively put on additional drop-in sessions for students, particularly as the employment market can be very different country to country. She went on to say that MS had been a very good link between the Careers team and students. LP said that resources will be added in due course to the HSU website in the form of employment guides and steps to success in finding work.

8. University update

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

- Review of Governance. The Education and Student Experience Committee and the Academic Standards and Audit Committee remain but there will be a new Students' Community Committee which will look at the broader student experience in a strategic way. MW will sit on the new Committee, but it will be chaired by the Dean of Students.
- UH Strategy. The Education and Student Experience Strand Plan is being revisited for 2023-24 because the UH Strategy for 2025-30 is also now being revisited.
- Student Hardship Fund. MW noted that this had been an excellent, collaborative project between HSU and UH, to offer almost the 'sector-leading' amount of money dedicated to student hardship. A commitment exists to review if necessary.
- The Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF). UH have now entered their submission. The university currently holds TEF Gold. Data points towards Silver but a robust submission may assist the re-awarding of Gold. The submissions are overseen by a team of three people with experience in learning and teaching, and experience of representing students, who will make recommendations on the award. An interim outcome will be announced in July, with the final award announced in September. The Award is held for four years. UH are looking towards the next submission in 2027.
- National Students' Survey. As discussed earlier, the survey is now open.
- Academic Skills Development. The first meeting (of three) of the task group has taken place and this will feed into the new Head of Academic Skills Development when appointed. The new appointee will take forward a significant review of the way UH supports students. MW thanked AT for his pivotal role in working to ensure UH strategically resolves this issue.
- ChatGPT. UH is working through what this new AI tool will mean for the university and the sector. MW said that UH will not retreat to exams to avoid the impact of ChatGPT but keep its forward and innovative-looking approach to assessment, while working with AI experts within the university to explore how the tool can be utilised as a resource within the assessment landscape. MW said she was confident that outcomes will encourage students to use it, where appropriate, and not to use the tool inappropriately. MW said that there is also another similar tool from Google which Google are looking to embed into their search engine. This has implications for choice and trusted sources.

- Vice-Chancellor's Awards (VCAs). These are now open and a chance to highlight members of the community for their hard work and commitment.
- EDI. UH is moving away from the use of the term 'BAME', with the terminology only to be used where required in a regulatory way to provide data. UH will encourage more specific use of descriptors where appropriate. Staff training is imminent. MW said that she felt this would be a challenge for most as it has become commonplace to use the term 'BAME' as a shorthand, but that this is an inappropriate way to describe colleagues from a range of backgrounds. There is absolutely a need to relearn the language used.
- Industrial action. This is ongoing, planned by UCU, and involves 18 days of strikes from 1st February. Staff that take part will be docked pay. As yet, the impact for students is not yet known but it is expected that there will be limited impact on the assessment boards across Semester A. However, MW said she was concerned about lost learning and students' confidence about submitting assessments. UH and HSU are working together collaboratively on this to ensure that students are not disadvantaged and are supported. In response to AT, MW said that ten members of staff took place in the first day of industrial action.

As ever, DB thanked MW for her valuable and candid briefing.

9. Elections update

The Board received a presentation in respect of the upcoming Elections cycle and changes to the process. SO highlighted the following:

- Much of the preparation has been in train since the autumn so the team have had the capacity to adapt the process in respect of changes to the cycle and Officer roles. Dates were amended by two weeks with the nomination period extended by three weeks.
- The voting period has been extended to three days with a presence on both campuses.
- He took the Board through the rules and regulations including, amongst others, opening hours, campaigning issues and the support Bootcamp.

DB thanked SO for his presentation, and additionally thanked him and his team for accommodating the changes to the process at short notice. He went on to ask if it was likely that additional Elections in the autumn might be necessary, given the significant increase in the number of Officer roles to be filled and concern that there may be insufficient candidates. SO replied that dates for a second set of Elections had been pencilled regardless, as it was quite likely that at least one of the roles may have a vacancy at that time.

In response to AT, RH said that Officers will be paired with other UH staff as part of the mentoring programme, aligned to the portfolio and thus role specific.

DB said results will be known before the next meeting of the Board of Trustees, but Trustees will be notified of the results in advance of this.

10. Review of NUS Action Plan on Antisemitism

DB reminded the Board about HSU's disaffiliation from NUS, the decision particularly influenced by the issues surrounding antisemitism last year. NUS have recently announced the outcome of Rebecca Tuck KC's investigation into antisemitism, along with a subsequent action plan. HSU have

recently met with UH’s JSoc and a representative from the Union of Jewish Students to go through any feedback from Rebecca Tuck’s report. MS reported that it had been a very productive conversation.

The Board received NUS’s Action Plan on Antisemitism. RH took Trustees through implications of NUS’s action plan for HSU. She highlighted the following:

- Training on antisemitism is in place for all staff and Officers, undertaken annually, as well as training on Islamophobia. UJS and HSU JSoc have asked HSU to lobby UH staff to undergo training and MS and RH are to follow up.
- A group of SUs have organised advanced training on antisemitism for senior leaders and RH will attend in April.
- HSU has an EDI action plan in place already in respect of an Inclusion and Liberation Strategy. This was developed as part of HSU’s accreditation for the National Centre for Diversity. A key element of this is the rollout of Inclusion Officers in Societies which has been in place since 2019.
- Whilst HSU is no longer affiliated to NUS’ campaigning arm, HSU will still be able to draw on the insight annually from NUS to inform ongoing discussions with JSoc and all Cultural/Faith Societies.
- Many of the recommendations surrounding the candidate preparation process for Elections has already been in place within HSU or can be easily updated, such as an update to Elections rules to reflect that candidates are asked to declare anything historic or current that could put their, HSU’s and/or UH’s reputations at risk and/or that could be in breach of policies, including HSU’s EDI policy.
- HSU’s governance was reviewed in 2019.
- Also in place, and for a considerable number of years, is HSU’s External Speakers Policy.

DB said that as part of the disaffiliation discussions amongst the Board, it was agreed to have the option to conduct a referendum for reaffiliation in due course and he suggested that the issue of reaffiliation should be reviewed annually. RH said that she too recommended an annual review by the Board but noted that she would not recommend an imminent effort to re-join NUS as it was very likely to be a contentious issue amongst Jewish students, and also Islamic students, in respect of their concerns around the manner in which the NUS President was removed from post. Board members therefore agreed to review affiliation status in February 2024.

11. Remuneration and Appointments Committee update

DB reported that current action is to hire a replacement Chair from September 2023 to take over on his retirement. A good response was received through LinkedIn. DB conducted informal discussions for interested parties and LP thanked DB for the considerable time commitment he had given in this respect. Shortlisting is underway with interviews being conducted on 24th February, the Panel consisting of RH, OS and SI.

12. Finance and Audit Committee update

SF reported that there will be an excess at the end of the year, and she has asked MS to look into ideas and enterprises to which some of these additional funds could be directed. She noted, that in light of today’s discussion surrounding part-time employment opportunities and support for students, it may be prudent to allocate some funds to this area at the appropriate time.

13. AOB

None noted.

Meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

<p>Next Meeting: Tuesday, 9th May - 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm (venue tbc)</p> <p><i>Future dates:</i> Tuesday, 13th June – 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm</p>
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