



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Wednesday, 9th October 2024 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Hamnah Baig (HB)
- Santosh Kumar Gottapu (SKG)
- Muhammad Anas Khan (MAK)
- Rohit Mahadevu (RM)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Rajiv Sudan (RS)
- Bob Walder (BW)
- Professor Mairi Watson (MW)

In attendance:

- Phillip Dowler, *Director of Advocacy and Opportunities, HSU (PD)*
- Sean Ferrie, *Director of Operations, HSU (SF)*
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU (RH)*
- Ansa Ithal, *incoming Student Trustee (AI)*
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU (KM)*
- Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU (LP)*

1. Apologies for absence

- Zhora Jasper
- Rikiba Bain Caton

Non-Attendance

- Dr Lucy Atkinson

Welcome

BW welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular, he offered a warm welcome to the new Elected Officers for 2024-25 and to Ansa Ithal, new Student Trustee.

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 Thursday, 20th June 2024.

4. CEO Update

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

- The student contribution for UH’s Access and Participation (APP) 2025 has been successfully submitted. The APP is a key regulatory document that outlines UH’s commitments to widening access to higher education for underrepresented groups, improving student success, and enhancing progression to further study or employment. The submission focuses on addressing gaps in participation, retention and attainment amongst disadvantaged students. The student submission was developed based on student insights which will support UH’s ongoing efforts to improve the student experience and ensure equitable opportunities for all. RH thanked HB, the lead student representative, and Faith Goligher and Arub Abbas from the HSU Insight and Policy team, for their excellent contributions and hard work on the project. RS commented that the plan was a well compiled and articulated response.
- The Peer Mentoring Programme has launched with 40 Peer Mentors recruited and trained, representing the Schools of Creative Arts and Law. The mentors will support their peers, particularly first-year students, by providing guidance and fostering engagement with their academic communities. Impact will be measured over the year with the aim of acknowledging that perhaps this is not a project to continue with or in fact, rolling out the programme to other Schools.
- Herts Unfiltered has launched, a new student voice initiative aimed at capturing real-time feedback on student’s experiences of settling into university life. In the first week, the project engaged with just under 1,000 students, collecting feedback to ensure that students feel connected and heard.
- The Government’s planned Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 has been halted by the new Education Secretary. HSU and UH have both undertaken a substantial amount of work in advance of the initially proposed date of the legislation coming into force so that were the Government to decide to go ahead, plans are in place. In response to RS, RH noted that there has always been a robust infrastructure in place in this area and it has always formed part of student group training. HSU are already very much ‘ahead of the curve’ in this area.
- UM asked about student staff training for 2024-25, enquiring if there is a completion date by which training must be undertaken and what plan was in place for those members of staff that had not completed their training. LP replied that some members of staff had been unable to complete the training in time as they had moved into accommodation late, so they have been given extra time. There is a final session imminent, by which time all training will be complete.

5. HSU review of academic year 2023/24 and 2024/25 priorities, including Start of Term update

The Board received a presentation on 2023/24 in review and 2024/25 plans.

RH highlighted the following in respect of 2023/24 services:

- HSU experienced strong engagement across its core services demonstrating the Union’s impact on the student experience.
- Events delivered attracted 7,535 students to daytime community events, outpacing the 5,307 attendees to night-time events at The Forum. RH noted this was an interesting

reflection on the student demographic, the student experience and indicates a price sensitivity, with many daytime events free of charge.

- HSU recorded 16,237 society members, much of this engagement coming as a result of the academic societies auto-enrolment scheme. Expansion of this is planned for the year to other undergraduate programmes. The Academic Engagement team will be exploring this programme with individual Schools to recognise that students do want to be part of an academic community within their Schools.
- RH offered her warm congratulations to LP and the Academic Societies Co-ordinator on the award of 'Very Good' in the Green Impact Accreditation for the first time.
- Over the year, staff satisfaction rose from 7.4 to 8.4 out of 10 on the weekly pulse survey, which looks at relationships with peers / managers, overall satisfaction at work, work/life balance etc. RS said that he was very pleased to see this, but he asked that if issues were articulated, were these being addressed. RH and SF replied that issues were absolutely addressed, and that anecdotal comments and feedback allow the team to be responsive.
- RH congratulated the Elected Officer team for 2023-24 on their achievements. In particular, alongside the Student Finance Team, the Officer team had achieved considerable success by working to alleviate pressures on self-funding students. This was particularly relevant to Nigerian students, affected by currency fluctuations.
- In respect of KPIs for the year, most have been achieved. In respect of those that are outstanding:
 - The NSS score is just below (-0.87%) the sector mean. The SLT and RM have been working on an action plan to drive this up, focusing on Schools such as SPECS and Creative Arts where engagement is lower than desirable. Much positive feedback came in from HSK and HBS, so the team are looking to replicate that work elsewhere.
 - Ensuring that student leaders reflect the demographic makeup of the university is part achieved. Encouraging further diversity across the Officer team and in SCOs is a priority.
 - Ensuring that 100% of SU services and student voice processes were fed back on from 1,000 students monthly was part achieved. There were on average 730 pieces of student insight per month. The Herts Unfiltered project will help this goal to be achieved.
 - Ensuring that SU communications are informed by student feedback and data, with 85% of students feeling that communications are relevant, clear and timely, is yet to be measured and is in train.

SF highlighted the following in respect of 2024/25 priorities:

- An aim to grow engagement in community events by 30%.
- Continued year on year growth for academic and non-academic societies.
- The Advice Team will aim to support 7.5% of the student population with a target of at least 85% student satisfaction. The team have been bolstered by an additional member of staff and are ensuring proactive outreach.
- The financial landscape for commercial events remains challenging. This will keep a focus on monitoring costs and exploring different ways to draw students to night-time events.
- Schools-based alignment of SCOs, Student Reps and Academic Societies to build School focused communities more relevant to students.

SF went on to provide a Start of term update and highlighted the following:

- Over 2,500 students attended a series of 14 (largely) alcohol-free events across campus for diverse, inclusive experiences. SF noted that there had been an issue with scanners, but

numbers reflect largely accurate estimates. He noted that many students returned for several events. In response to RS, SF said that the night-time activity must continue to evolve but there is certainly an appetite for smaller daytime events and the team are continually trying to be innovative. He said that 99% of non-nightclub events are alcohol free. RH went on to say that UH have recently provided additional funding to enhance this provision further in response to the significant growth. HSU is one of the early Unions in the UK to lead on non-alcohol led events and the HSU Events Manager recently spoke at a conference of other Unions to share good practice in this area.

- Freshers' Fair attracted approx. 5,000 students despite the weather. SF drew attention to the hard work and endeavours of the whole HSU team who supported the event.
- 5,600 students attended eight consecutive nights of events at The Forum, which was down by around 700, year on year. This is a reflection on a continued downward trend in the numbers of home students living in campus accommodation. Average spend per head was £8.01, up from £7.87 last year.
- Society taster sessions this year will run over a month, as opposed to a week, to allow students to sample different societies and settle in.

6. Officer Priorities 2024/25

RM updated the Board on the priorities for the Officer team for the coming year. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- UM thanked RM for his presentation and noted the volume of work planned by the team. He asked how success will be tracked. RM replied that bi-weekly and monthly meetings are planned to monitor progress and to offer support. RS went on to ask if the plan was for all Officers to meet at these sessions as he said it was important not to work in 'silos' and to reflect the intersectionality of the student experience. He noted common themes across Officer briefs, such as safety and communications, and said it was important to have an overarching approach with individual, nuanced strands. Building on that, BW said it would be useful to agree a set of basic principles around themes which can be used to drive individual streams while maintaining a common approach. RM noted the role of the Lead Office Co-ordinator who supports and acts a main conduit for the team. He went on to say that the team are keen to make an impact and to work collaboratively.
- RH congratulated RM on his wonderfully positive start to the year. She went on to say that each of the Officers had equally 'hit the ground running' and had been such a visible and positive presence. She thanked everyone for their contributions during the Freshers' period. RM thanked RH and the SLT team, as well as MW and UH, for their valuable support and guidance. MW said she very much enjoyed her recent first meeting with RM and looked forward to working together over the year.

7. University Update

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

- UH Finances. Despite sector wide challenges, UH is in a financially very strong position with turnover of £420m, and a final surplus of just over 3%. This academic year turnover is predicted at £440m with a similar surplus.
- Graduation Ceremonies. 24 ceremonies took place over two weeks, delivered with student celebrations on campus before the ceremonies were conducted at St Albans' Abbey. In February, there will be ten days of graduations.

- Start of Term. This has been a very smooth process this year. UH have welcomed almost 13k new students on to campus at the beginning of term. 7,540 are International students, with a slightly different distribution of students this year. Student numbers in HBS are slightly down (-500) on last year welcoming 3,365 International, and SPECS slightly up (+500) at 2,284 International students. 3,000 undergraduate Home students and 1,500 postgraduate Home students were also welcomed.
- SPECTRA building. This new state-of-the-art building has now opened.
- Investment. Work is now underway on demolition of the buildings in the centre of campus to make way for the building of the new Medical School which will open in 2026. For the first year, the intake will bring 70 International medical students on to campus while UH awaits NHS allocation.
- Skilled Education partnership. UH celebrated one year of the online partnership with Skilled Education.
- King's Award for Enterprise in International Trade. This award recognises those who are leading in their fields in international trade, innovation and sustainable development. UH was commended for its outstanding achievements in international recruitment.
- Restructure of the School of Health and Social Work, and the School of Life and Medical Sciences. MW consulted on and concluded a proposal to restructure both Schools to combine them with the Medical School to create a single School of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences from 1st March 2025. Given time pressures, there was not an opportunity to conduct extensive student consultation with the proposal, but this is being actioned in the coming months so that students understand the changes and can input into the implementation of the new structure. Changes have been made only at levels above departmental level and as part of that, recruitment for the new Dean is underway. RM will be on the interview panel. This will ultimately lead to three larger Schools within UH (HBS, SPECS and HMLS) and two smaller Schools (Creative Arts and the School of Law and Education).
- League Table performance. MW noted significant improvements in League Table performance. In The Daily Mail University Guide for 2025, UH moved from 62nd to 54th. In The Sunday Times UK University Rankings 2025, UH moved from 95th to 83rd. Finally, in The Guardian University Guide 2025, UH moved from 87th to 75th. Highlighting that UH had stood at 103rd in The Guardian rankings in 2021, MW said that this represented a quartile move.
- Visits. MW highlighted her programme during September, visiting: the Bayfordbury campus; UH's campus in Egypt for graduation ceremonies; Sky studios, in connection with the Propeller Stage One project which offers a working commercial film studio for independent production companies to hire at a significantly reduced rate if opportunities for students studying at UH are facilitated; University of Derby with a peer group of DVCs from the University Alliance to share best practice; Universities UK Conference, which launched a report with London Economics, which showed that for every £1 of public money invested into UK universities, £14 of economic benefit is generated.
- Recruitment of new Vice-Chancellor. This is now well underway with interviews taking place at the end of November. Both RH and RM will be involved in the process.

BW thanked MW for the extensive and impressive list of achievements she had shared.

8. Year-end Accounts and September Management Accounts

The Board received an update from LP who highlighted the following:

- September Accounts have not yet closed. Broadly, wet sales were higher than budgeted, ticket income lower but additional monies have been generated on private hire.
- Last year finished in a positive financial position with a surplus of £41,609. Contributing to this, some departments experienced salary savings, although this in no way impacted output, through maternity leave and struggles with recruitment. Managers continue to remain focused on cost control.
- HSU’s main aim is how to invest in students and the introduction of interns has been a great success in this area. LP introduced AI, who had been an intern with the team during the summer, and who HSU have been fortunate enough to secure as a Student Trustee going forward.
- HSU’s office accommodation has been redesigned to accommodate the growing staff team and to ensure a more collaborative and welcoming working space.
- Enterprises underperformed but private hire is growing and is the focus for the Commercial team.
- After taking legal advice, Exceptional Income was released back to the accounts due to the holding of funds which had not been claimed. RS said that previously there had been a stated ambition for these monies to be reinvested in specific targeted areas once released and he asked the team to keep this in mind.
- RS asked if it would be possible to revisit the request for representatives from the Students’ Union Superannuation Scheme (SUSS) to attend a future Board meeting to update Trustees on the latest status and re-evaluate the deficit. LP said that it is planned to invite them to February’s meeting of the Board when the agenda allows for sufficient time for discussion.

LP

9. Appointments

Appointment of Deputy Chair

RM was nominated by UM and seconded by MW, and duly approved by Trustees to serve as Deputy Chair.

Appointment of Student Governor

RM was nominated by RS and seconded by UM, and duly approved by Trustees to serve as Student Governor.

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

RS confirmed that he would serve as Chair for this academic year, and this was duly approved by Trustees.

People Committee

UM confirmed that he would serve as Chair and BW confirmed that he would serve as the External Trustee representative for this academic year. This was duly approved by Trustees.

Academic Board

HB was reconfirmed by Trustees as the student representative to attend the Academic Board for this academic year.

RH noted that all Elected Officers and Student Trustees have a standing invitation to attend both the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and People Committee meetings. She also noted that dates would be circulated once confirmed with Committee members.

10. AOB

BW reminded Trustees that discussions at Board Meetings remain confidential and sometimes cover issues which are not appropriate for those outside of the Board to be aware of.

RS said that he would welcome any invitations to appropriate events in order to extend the ambassadorial role of External Trustees.

Meeting closed at 5.30 pm.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 21st November 2024

Dates for 2024/25 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Thursday, 27th February 2025
Wednesday, 9th April 2025
Thursday, 29th May 2025
Thursday, 26th June 2025