



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 13th November 2025 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Jubair Ahmed (JAh)
- Judith Albert (JAI)
- Mariangel Briceno Riverol (MBR)
- Cynthia Bryan (CBr)
- Furqan Miah (FM)
- Umar Mohamad (UM)
- Muhatasim Sadat Nibir (MSN)
- Bob Walder (BW)

In attendance:

- Guy Blake, *Audit Director, Godfrey Wilson* (GB) in part
- Phillip Dowler, *Director of Advocacy and Opportunities, HSU* (PD)
- Sean Ferrie, *Director of Operations, HSU* (SF)
- Rebecca Hobbs, *Chief Executive Officer, HSU* (RH)
- Maria McCaffrey, *Finance Manager, HSU* (MM) in part
- Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)
- Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)

1. Welcome

BW opened the meeting and welcomed Trustees to today’s discussions. He highlighted the written update received from CBa, who had most kindly supplied it in lieu of her absence from today’s meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

- Dr Charmagne Barnes
- Hauwa Jijwa
- Rajiv Sudan

Non-Attendance

None

3. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

4. Minutes of previous meetings

The Board of Trustees approved the minutes of the previous meetings held on 14th October 2025.

GB joined the meeting at 4.05 pm.

5. Year-end Accounts and Audit Report

BW introduced Guy Blake, Audit Director, Godfrey Wilson, and welcomed him to the meeting.

The Board received a briefing on the Audit Report. This was carried out during September and GB reported that overall the Audit had proceeded very smoothly. Sufficient appropriate evidence was gathered to issue an unqualified Audit Opinion.

GB highlighted the following in respect of Year-end Accounts:

- Overall Group income for the year stood at £2.9m, an overall increase on the prior year, largely due to an increase in the Block Grant, offsetting some decreases in other areas.
- A slight reduction in trading income, with a particular challenge in bar sales, has been offset by revenue hire which performed well during the year.
- There has been an overall increase in expenditure, largely fluctuations due to uplifts in staffing costs ie a higher headcount during the year. In the prior year, there were high costs associated with refurbishment, but these are one-offs, which have offset the difference in staff costs.
- The overall Group position at the year-end is a surplus of £129k. At the outset of the Audit fieldwork, there was an overall breakeven position. The surplus is the outcome of two large adjustments that were made during the Audit process: 1) the pension provision is largely recognised on a cash basis during the year with a one-off adjustment within the year-end process to change the liability on the balance sheet. This is a complicated adjustment and is not usually done for Management Account purposes but will result in some fluctuations at year-end when it is revalued; 2) there are a number of deferred income balances that the Charity were entitled to recognise. The most significant of these was the National Insurance rebate that had not been reclaimed for a few years, totalling around £20k. This has now been recognised this year as a one-off. Overall, these two adjustments alone contribute to around £86k of the surplus.
- Charity's position as at 31st July 2025. There are some differences in debtors and cash, largely relating to inter-company balances. Last year at year-end, there was a much higher balance owing from Enterprises to the main charity, which was paid before year-end this year. The overall Group position has not fluctuated anywhere near as much. Within Creditors, there were some quite high balances relating to accruals to the University. The defined pension liability deficit reflects the total payments to be made over the payback period discounted by the time value of money. This has been discounted, based on AAA corporate bonds, in line with accounting standards. As an estimate, there is a letter of representation point around this to note that Trustees are satisfied with that particular rate for discounting. GB said this was consistent with what is used at other student unions and is satisfactory, and clearly presented as an accounting estimate. He further noted that the Notes to the Accounts are prepared consistently compared to other years.

- Enterprises position as of 31st July 2025. These results are incorporated into the Group Accounts. Overall, Enterprises has had a good year and has broken even. Bar sales continue to be a challenge, but this has been offset with additional venue hire. Debtors are slightly higher at this time of the year, largely the result of Freshers' Fair.

FM joined the meeting at 4.15 pm.

GB went on to highlight the following in respect of the Management Letters:

UHSU Management Letter Year Ended 31 July 2025

- Significant Matters Discussed During the Audit - Restricted income recognition. It has been noticed that restricted grant income received in advance is currently being recognised in line with the expenditure of the funds, which is not strictly compliant with the Charities SORP. The recommendation is that any deferred income adjustments are completed in advance of Audit fieldwork commencing next year. Otherwise, current treatment will result in continued differences between management accounts and statutory accounts.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - historic restricted funds. There were multiple historic restricted fund balances, relating to previous funding from the university, that have remained during the year. In most cases, the associated activities have ceased. MM and the Finance team are undertaking a review this current year. Where there may be a change needed, the team will aim to gain approval for a change of use.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - historic sundry creditors. The balance sheet includes some historic sundry creditor amounts that have remained unchanged for an extended period totalling £9.6k. MM and the Finance team note that they are looking to release sundry creditors this year.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - tangible fixed assets. During review of the fixed asset register, a significant number of assets were recorded at nil (£0) cost. MM and the Finance team are working on this currently to review all assets linking them to sequential coding labels and auditing what assets are registered.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - Reserves policy. HSU's current reserves policy is to retain 10% of the Block Grant as the benchmark. Based on the 2025 Block Grant value, the minimum reserves target is approx £150k. The charity's free reserves stood at £418k at the year end. This suggests that either the target is too low, or HSU is holding reserves in excess. GB said this should be reviewed by the Board and Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, with useful guidance available from the Charity Commission or Godfrey Wilson themselves to assist decision-making.

UHSU Enterprises Ltd Management Letter Year Ended 31 July 2025

- Significant Matters Discussed During the Audit - Historic creditor balances. The balance sheet continues to reflect approx. £50k in historic creditor balances, including revenue share amounts owed to the University relating to the last four financial years. The recommendation is that a formal review of the non-University creditor balances is undertaken during the 2025/26 financial year, with a view to releasing any amounts to income that are deemed no longer payable.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - documentation with the University. There is a continued recommendation around the issue of there being no formal agreement with the University for the grant to be passed from the parent undertaking to the company. This lack could

cause the charity to be open to challenge from regulators that it is using charitable funds to support a potentially loss-making. This risk should be added to the Risk Register.

- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - locking of Xero. Multiple supplier invoices were either recorded in the incorrect accounting period or misclassified as accrued rather than trade creditors, primarily due to Xero being locked on a regular basis. It is recommended reviewing the timing and frequency of system lockouts, particularly around key reporting dates.
- Appendix 1 - Recommendations - number of directors. The company currently has two directors, both of whom are remunerated staff members. This results in the absence of independent oversight at Board level.

Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked GB for his presentation. He noted the recent meeting of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee which had thoroughly reviewed the Year-end Accounts and Audit Report.
- RS went on to ask about the Recommendation for an independent director to be appointed to USHSU Enterprises Ltd if HSU and what the implications would be were HSU not to follow that advice. GB said that if HSU noted their rationale for not following the Recommendation, that would suffice.
- GB noted that the Accounts are ready to be signed off and these are with BW and RH currently. LP noted that the Accounts cannot be filed until all company directors have completed their self-registration on the Companies House website. She asked that this was completed as soon as possible.
- BW thanked LP, MM and the Finance team for their hard work and endeavours. RH echoed this, noting their hard work and considerable efforts over the course of the Audit.
- BW went on to thank GB for his advice and support.

GB and MM left the meeting at 4.30 pm.

6. CEO Update

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

- This term has seen the successful launch of the School Student Forums across the five Schools of study, which has been very positive. This is a new approach to student voice in the Schools, with hundreds of pieces of feedback received from students.
- Phase 1 of Herts Unfiltered has now concluded, with feedback from over 4,000 students.
- The Community Events team has delivered 32 non-alcohol-related events so far this term, engaging more than 4,600 students to date.
- The Forum continues to perform above expectations and is on track to finish the year approx £20k ahead of budget. The Herts Pass scheme, which allows students entry for every Wednesday when they buy their Freshers' pass, has had a significant positive impact.
- The Employment Rights Bill, which received Royal Assent earlier this year, marks one of the most significant overhauls of employment law in recent decades. It will change how HSU support part-time staff. The HR team is currently reviewing policies and procedures to ensure full compliance. LP is supporting other student unions and their work around this.

7. Elected Officer Report

The Board received the Elected Officer report from JAh. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- JAh noted action plans have been finalised for the Elected Officer team, and that they are meeting with their appointed mentors.
- JA said that it was an excellent experience working on her action plan. She thanked SF for his kind input and support.
- UM asked for some further detail on the proposal for instant booking style accommodation for students. JAh explained that he has proposed the idea to the VC on utilising empty rooms as short-term stays for commuting students, with flexible stay lengths. He said that current arrangements are not accessible and response times for bookings are too slow via email currently. Costs are also not student-friendly. BW said that he thought this sounded like a very good idea. LP noted that UEA have a similar model in a very small hotel-style facility, and it may prove fruitful to speak to them.

8. Elections Review Proposal

The Board received a presentation from PD on a proposal to assess the impact and delivery of core representative functions, namely Officer posts. Key issues centre around two main elements: 1) the single President Model which can be an overburdened role, offer weak team cohesion, and presents high risk as a single point of failure. Sector trend shows early resignations leaving unions without leadership for extended periods, and a move away from use of hierarchy to balance student voice; and 2) the Part-Time Officer Model offers confusion among students following introduction of School-based Officers and SCO transition. SCOs demonstrate stronger engagement and integration into student life. As a result of consultation, review and other change in the last year, cost-neutral recommendations were presented to Trustees to introduce two full-time Officers ie President (Education) and President (Communities), from the end of the current Officers' term. In addition, there would be a transition from the part-time Officer model to an expanded SCO structure, from the end of the current Officers' term, whereby the additional SCO roles are funded by Herts SU. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked PD for the thoughtful and comprehensive presentation. He said he was positive and supportive of this approach, especially if it leads to a more diverse and representative team of Officers in terms of representing the university cohort.
- UM also noted the excellent presentation. He acknowledged that this represents further fundamental change, following other major changes in recent years. He said he would like to understand what is driving these ongoing changes. PD replied that last year's changes were structural and procedural. Regarding voting, the caucus approach will be retained for the President positions as it received great feedback and will continue as planned. Voting will return to in-person because the conduct around online voting last year was not always satisfactory. Action-planning would continue to be data-led, with SCOs' action planning done in collaboration with Schools and University teams. All other initiatives will continue regardless. In respect of the President role, there is currently risk around a single Officer position, alongside a trend of Officers leaving positions early. Redeployment in the part-time Officer model is not easy. Previously, there was insufficient oversight of SCOs, leading to significant overlap that has caused reputational harm and confusion between roles. PD said that the aim is to improve clarity and oversight to ensure the transition is positive.

- UM asked about the transition from ten democratically Elected Officers to two appointed Elected Officers, and whether there had been any feedback on how students might react to this change. PD replied that reactions will inevitably be mixed. For example, there is a particular, small group of students who have prior engagement with Russell Group institutions who may have different expectations. Students are currently engaging more with SCOs and working more closely with those roles than with the democratic appointees. PD stressed that the approach whereby Student Council elect Officer Trustees to the Board would be retained.
- JAh asked if there was a risk of any tension between the two Presidents, particularly where decision-making overlaps. PD said he did not think this would be the case or provide any more risk than currently exists within the existing structure. He said that it is healthy to have differences of opinion and HSU would provide support in working together and finding the best way forward for student leaders. BW said there were plentiful examples in other industries with joint heads of an organisation, for example in the arts with a commercial and artistic lead, work together. Ironically, he noted, two heads often force individuals to work together and collaborate in a constructive way.
- MBR said she was concerned about how students would perceive the roles of the current Elected Officer team while these proposals are introduced. PD said all Officers will continue to be supported by HSU to be impactful and see through their action plans this year, with clarity for students on the differences between SCO and Officer positions. RS noted that messaging must be well crafted and well evidenced when this is communicated to the wider community. PD replied that work will be undertaken with HSU’s Marketing Manager and with existing student leaders to ensure clarity through the transition.
- BW suggested that this form of review may be required annually in order for HSU to be responsive to the university and the wider sector. RH agreed, saying that the UH student population is volatile in terms of student engagement and HSU therefore needs to be the union that students need it to be at that moment in time. She said she welcomed this upcoming change, and that PD was to be congratulated, as a key strategic driver in this area, for being responsive to students. She noted that very often counterparts in the sector do not engage quite as fully with their student cohort, but that it is an issue HSU feel very strongly about. She thanked JAh for his informative and candid input into this process which had been most valuable in allowing thinking to take shape.

CBr joined the meeting at 5.15 pm.

9. Budget 2025-26

The Board received the Budget for 2025-26.

RH noted that this confirmed the Budget and acknowledged that the process had been particularly complex this year. She thanked colleagues in UH for their very supportive and collaborative approach to the Budget process, which has enabled HSU to maintain its budget position. RS thanked RH and said it was vital, from a best practice point of view, that the Board had sight of the Budget and the option to ask questions. He said it was important that next year there is more time built in for such reflection.

10. Amendment to Student Council Byelaw

The Board received a paper on a proposed change to Byelaw 1 - Governance. PD explained that during the academic year 2024-25, it was agreed at People Committee and the Board of Trustees to change the process for appointing part-time Elected Officers due to the risk to governance being deemed too significant. The detail of the decision was that the President would retain an automatic place on the board, typically with them acting as Deputy Chair, and that three additional appointments would be made via a secret ballot at Student Council of interested candidates. For good governance, PD recommended that text should be inserted into Byelaw 1 - Governance to reflect this appointment of Elected Officers via secret ballot at Student Council of interested candidates.

The Board approved the insertion of the appropriate text into Byelaw 1 - Governance.

11. Risk Register

The Board received the latest iteration of the Risk Register. RH noted that nothing new had been added, but that further consideration will be given to the Employment Rights Bill and what risks this may present when there is further clarity. RH highlighted that individual departmental Risk Registers have also been updated.

12. Health and Safety Policy and Health, Safety and Wellbeing update

The Board received a presentation from SF on Health, Safety and Wellbeing.

SF introduced the updated Health and Safety Policy for this academic year, setting out the high-level approach and key accountabilities, with himself as lead. He reported that he has been working on bringing this policy 'to life' for staff through in-person training sessions to ensure it remains front of mind, and also to strengthen the organisation's Health and Safety culture using real-life examples. These sessions began this week and will continue throughout November. The policy will be uploaded to the staff HR portal for all staff to access and will also be shared on the Teams staff channel so that the Elected Officers have access. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked about resilience in this area, noting the importance of succession planning and identifying an alternate lead given that SF currently appears to solely hold responsibility. SF replied that the organisation has a strong Health and Safety culture, particularly in those higher-risk areas such as The Forum, Events provision and face-to-face student activity. He noted that one of the purposes of the training sessions is to take a proactive approach and ensure consistency across teams, especially following some staff turnover in the past year. The sessions are intended to engage all staff and to make sure Health and Safety remains front of mind. RH seconded SF's comments regarding the strength of Health and Safety practices across teams. She said that risk management is well embedded, including within the student groups that HSU Managers support. She expressed confidence that this culture is embedded throughout all levels of the organisation.
- RS reiterated his suggestion that a brief 'Health and Safety' moment at the start of meetings would provide a useful focus point, encouraging teams to reflect on key issues.

SF moved on to give a report on Health, Safety and Wellbeing for the month. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked whether the recent harassment incidents had been satisfactorily resolved. SF confirmed that they had, noting that the individuals involved had been banned from the venue and that the cases were reported to the Dean of Students, who reviewed bodycam and CCTV footage and took appropriate action depending on the nature of the behaviour. He added that victims were contacted and supported by the University. RS asked if police had been involved at any point. SF replied that the police had been involved in the knife incident and attended site, where the student was arrested.
- JAh asked whether there were more incidents at promoter-led events compared with HSU-organised events. SF reported that incidents during Halloween week were evenly split across event types, though certain events tended to result in more fighting and physical altercations.
- CBr asked further about any emerging trends. SF noted a trend in how some harassment incidents were being responded to, with male students increasingly attempting to confront alleged harassers on behalf of friends or partners. He explained that this is not an appropriate or safe approach and that students who do so are also removed from the venue. Staff continue to reinforce the correct procedures for reporting and managing such incidents.

13. AOB

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and People Committee

The Board received the minutes from recent meetings of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and People Committee minutes.

HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information.

Common HE Acronyms

The Board received a useful briefing sheet on useful acronyms used across the sector.

Other

RS thanked RH and the team for his invitation to the Investiture event. He was delighted to be a part of such a special event.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 19th February 2026

Dates for 2025/26 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Thursday, 16th April 2026

Thursday, 14th May 2026
