



University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 18th September 2025 on campus and via MS Teams

Present:

Jubair Ahmed (JAh)
Judith Albert (JAl)
Dr Charmagne Barnes (CBa)
Mariangel Briceno Riverol (MBR)
Cynthia Bryan (CBr)
Hauwa Jijwa (HJ)
Furqan Miah (FM)
Umar Mohamad (UM)
Muhatasim Sadat Nibir (MSN)
Rajiv Sudan (RS)
Bob Walder (BW)

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)
Karen McKenna, *Secretary, HSU* (KM)
Leena Patel, *Director of People and Resources, HSU* (LP)

1. Welcome

BW opened the meeting. He noted that due to CB's other commitments, he would amend the order of the Agenda and take her update as the first item.

2. Apologies for absence

None

Non-Attendance

None

3. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

4. University Update

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

- NSS. UH scored an overall positivity of 85%, improving in every theme, with the exception of 'freedom of expression'. CBa is in the process of compiling institutional actions after consultation with all Schools. 'Assessment and feedback' performed very well compared to the sector. 'Teaching on my course' went down for the third year in a row, but still remains high at 84.6%. The whole sector has improved but as a learning and teaching university, UH must continue to build on progress. With the support of HSU to promote facilities, and Induction programmes underway, CBa said that she hoped that these layered approaches would promote the 'academic support' theme and raise awareness of all that is available to students in this area. Discussions are underway with HSU about how to move issues around 'freedom of expression' forward. UH is now 33rd out of 146 institutions, a 13-place rise from last year. CBa noted that learning and teaching, academic support and student voice should be the areas of focus for this year.

UM asked whether, moving forward, the focus was on sustaining the improvements already achieved or on driving further progress. CBa replied that the sector as a whole is improving, with UH currently in the top quartile. However, remaining there is not easy, as the benchmark continues to move upwards. She said that the aim is to avoid falling into a catch-up position and while noting that further gains may be possible over the next 1–2 years, the greater challenge will be in sustaining excellence, which requires significant effort. The key question, moving forward, is how to engage both staff and students to maintain momentum.

CBr asked whether the issues raised under 'teaching on my course' reflected perception or a real gap. CBa replied that qualitative comments indicated real concerns about poor teaching when it occurs. In particular, this may also reflect experiences for those students who are on long placements - when these do not go well, students may rate teaching and learning poorly as they are completing the NSS while out on placement. CBa emphasised that although significant improvements have been made across all themes, and the trajectory is positive, there is always room for further enhancement. Every module now has a named module leader, giving students a clear point of contact, but staff being unavailable or using out-of-office responses to emails is unhelpful and undermines confidence. Schools will conduct audits to ensure good practice is being followed. Clearer messaging is critical, alongside continued embedding of the personal tutor framework, which is proving valuable. CBa stressed that diligence is required across the institution to maintain standards, acknowledging the challenges in a large organisation.

- PTES. An overall satisfaction score of 91% (vs 93.8% 2024) which keeps UH in the top 10 of universities, at 8th. Impressive results across the 10 themes, with the least being 82% for 'community' and the highest for 'online resources' at 94%.
- League Tables. UH is now 48 out of 123 universities, a rise of 27 places, in the 2026 Guardian University Guide. In The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026, UH climbed 16 places to now be ranked 67th, whilst out of 19 universities in the South East of England, the university is listed 9th. In the Graduate Outcomes survey, UH sits at 72.1% moving up from 82nd to 62nd. Given the competition in the sector, RS asked for CBa's thoughts about the recently announced news of a merger between two universities and how common such developments may become in future. CBa said that UH's approach is always to be proactive. However, mergers carry risks, particularly when taking on institutions that are underperforming, given the challenges inherent in driving up standards and the potential impact of league table positions. She noted that such dynamics reflect the evolving landscape of contemporary higher education, where mergers are becoming part of the sector's reality. She went on to note that this illustrates why the TEF has become so

important. The Office for Students have opened up a consultation on the TEF, and it will continue to focus on the undergraduate population and be a desk-based assessment. There are hints that a Bronze rating could carry penalties, potentially a cap on student numbers. The pressure is therefore significant. CBa emphasised that UH is progressing strongly and said she knew she could rely on the Board and HSU to work with her on the many initiatives to enhance the student experience.

- Careers Development Framework. Launched from 1st September 2025 across all Level 4 programmes.
- Student Voice Framework. This approach for a centralised facilitation to formalise, support and encourage the Student Voice has now launched and CBa thanked HSU for their support with this. In addition, the School Academic Committees have now been discontinued because academic and student issues were being conflated. Programme Committees, Student Forums and the PVC Advisory Group will form the new structure and allow for clearer differentiation and a more structured focus for discussions.
- Student engagement project, part of Resilient Futures. This initiative focuses on 'active learning', using a pedagogy of student-led enquiry, where students are actively involved in their learning. Teaching and learning will be structured to compel and support student engagement in the classroom, with some adjustments to assessments likely to be required. The impact will be particularly measured through attendance, recognising that commuting students, in particular, need to feel that coming onto campus is worthwhile. 'Active learning' and assessment changes are designed to address this challenge.
- Observation of teaching. This is being introduced on a rolling two-year basis, with a developmental focus but can be used for performance management. Peer review of teaching still remains.

BW thanked CBa for joining the meeting given her schedule, and for her most valuable and interesting update.

CBa left the meeting at 4.25 pm.

5. Introductions

BW led the introductions and welcomed all new Trustees to the meeting. BW, RS and UM offered their support and advice to all Officer and Student Trustees if, at any time, they would like to seek guidance or assistance.

6. CEO Update

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

- The 2025 NSS results show strong progress for HSU with a satisfaction score now standing at 77.4%, an increase of 5.4 percentage points on last year. This improvement has moved HSU from 85th to 43rd place in the unofficial SU league table.
- HSU has been working in partnership with UH's Centre for Education and Student Success and with representatives in each School to develop School Student Forums. These will create a space for students and staff to discuss School-wide and wider student experience

issues. This was very much a collaborative effort from last year's President, Director of Advocacy and Opportunities and Academic Experience Manager to bring this to fruition.

- UH has recently developed its Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech (as required by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, setting out a clear framework for managing events and activities both on University premises and in its name, which includes HSU activity. HSU is fully aligned with this framework and has adopted the policy as our guiding approach. RH noted that Trustees can be assured that the Union's procedures are consistent with the updated Code of Practice, ensuring that obligations under the new regulatory environment are being met. UM asked if monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure ongoing compliance. RH replied that part of UH's duty is to educate all incoming students on the university's approach to freedom of speech, and under the Office for Students' regulations, the university must be able to demonstrate compliance. Additionally, from a Prevent perspective, UH need to demonstrate and evidence that appropriate due diligence has been completed for all external speakers, whether invited by UH or HSU, coming on to campus. UH holds overall responsibility for compliance, with HSU contributing to the process.
- Training for the new Officer team is currently underway.
- From May 2026, the University will start admitting students from Semester C (early May start date). The expected uptake of this cohort will start at approximately 1000-1200 students, and they will be based primarily in the Business School and the School of Physics, Engineering and Computer Science. HSU has requested (and verbally been granted) funding for an additional member of staff starting from March 2026 to support this cohort and are working up protocol for these students to engage as society members, Student Representatives and SCOs. Additionally, a Welcome Week programme of activity will be prepared for these students, and whilst not on the scale of the September Welcome Week, it will closely mirror our January Welcome Week activity. UM asked whether any future resources or risk management measures would be required for Semester C. RH replied that risk management protocols already in place will remain because a similar pattern of student engagement is expected, albeit that timelines shift to align with the new intake. However, alongside the additional staff member, funding will be required to enable delivery of activities to the cohort. This has been agreed at £35k in year one, ramping up thereafter. In response to CBr, RH confirmed that the agreement for the funding has now been formalised. HJ asked if there was a plan for Semester C students to ensure they feel part of the wider student community. RH said that HSU are currently reviewing Society and Student rep provision, given that the academic year runs from September to May for most students. Discussions are taking place with SCOs to explore the best approach, which may include appointing dedicated Semester C reps but certainly will involve developing a tailored, bespoke model for the cohort.

7. Start of Term update

The Board received a presentation from SF on Start of Term activities. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked SF for the interesting presentation. In terms of student wellbeing, he noted the importance of ensuring support for students given the changing external political environment and current events around marches/flags etc. He highlighted the need to be mindful of students who may be living away from home for the first time and acknowledging that these events could significantly impact their overall experience and wellbeing. RS added that this was a heartfelt concern that he personally felt, and he suspected others would share it. PD replied that students are indeed approaching HSU's

Advice and Support Centre with wellbeing concerns. There is a strong relationship between HSU and UH and referral pathways have been reviewed, enabling casework to be managed more efficiently. As a result and with systems changed and improved, cases are being resolved more quickly and students are receiving stronger support. He also noted that Elected Officers are continuing to prioritise wellbeing, with JAI raising the issue only yesterday. The Advice Centre team also top up training regularly to ensure they remain responsive. PD noted that HSU is in a good position but will remain alert and responsive as things develop. SF added that UH has recently undertaken research into staff and student perceptions around EDI and the extent to which they feel supported. Early results have scored highly, suggesting a good starting point, though he noted it would be important to monitor given the difficult times ahead.

- FM asked for background to the anti-harassment campaign. SF said during the last academic year there had been a rise in reports of harassment activity across campus, mostly towards women, but affecting all students. In response, an awareness campaign was launched to ensure victims are fully supported when they come forward and that perpetrators are dealt with fairly but robustly at a university level, with the potential for further police involvement if necessary. The aim, over time, is to change behaviour and culture.
- FM went on to ask what is being done to improve communication between Societies and their members. He shared feedback that, when joining, he had signed up to several Societies but had only heard back from one. SF acknowledged this is a common issue and explained that additional resource is being directed towards supporting Committees to provide a better experience for members. He said that while activity must remain student-led, the aim is to strengthen support and help improve communication to ensure students feel engaged, without undermining the autonomy of Societies.

8. Officer Priorities 2025/26

The Board received a report on the activities of the new Elected Officer team and priorities for 2025/26 from JAh. Each Elected Officer commented on their own action plan. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS thanked the team for their briefing. He highlighted his work with Affinity Water, a major local employer, and suggested that building closer links between such employers and UH could create valuable part-time and graduate opportunities for students. He suggested that he and JAh speak to explore potential opportunities.
- HJ noted differences between DeHav and College Lane campuses, where food options, the shop and multi-faith facilities are less available at DeHav. She also highlighted the importance of providing flexible on-campus job opportunities to help students and allow them to work while balancing their studies.
- BW thanked JAh and the Officer team for their input today and said he was pleased to hear about all the projects in train, adding that he very much looked forward to seeing how their work develops over the year.

9. Draft End of Year Accounts 2024-25

The Board received a report on the End of Year Accounts 2024-25 from LP who highlighted the following:

- Original forecast anticipated a year-end surplus of £3,428.

Signed Dated

- Enterprises have off-set the previously forecast £34k deficit through increased private hire activity, to reach this full-year forecast now indicating a small profit. LP extended her thanks to SF and his team for their hard work achieving this outcome.
- The End of Year Accounts are currently under review by auditors, and the process is progressing well. As part of this, adjustments are made in line with changes to the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP). HSU received an employer's allowance last year, which had initially been allocated for use in the current year. However, the auditors have confirmed that statutory accounting requires release of this within the previous year's accounts. This adjustment means that it is now expected to report a year-end surplus of approximately £30,000, representing 1.5% of the Union's combined income from UHSU Enterprises Ltd and UHSU. This is a technical change rather than an operational one.
- The outcome reflects HSU's prudent financial management, and maintaining a modest but positive surplus reinforces the ability to invest in core services to support students and manage future financial risks responsibly.
- RS thanked LP for the update and asked whether changes to SORP could be reflected in amended Terms of Reference for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, noting the implications for company directors. RH replied that the Audit Management Letter will set out this information. She went on to say that as HSU is an incorporated charity, directors have no personal liability. Additionally, the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee is an advisory Committee to the Board and does not have decision-making authority in its remit. Therefore, no amendment to the Terms of Reference is required.
- UM asked for clarity on the timeline of the Audit. LP replied that the Audit is underway, with reviews by the Finance team taking place right through to 24th October 2025. The process will be completed by 13th November 2025. The first Finance, Audit and Risk Committee takes place on 7th November 2025, by which point the process will be very close to being finalised.
- LP noted that all Trustees, as company directors, will soon be required to log on to the Companies House website to verify their identity in order to prevent fraud and 'silent directorships' and to increase transparency and accountability. LP will be advising on the process via email.
- BW thanked LP for the update. He went on to thank LP and her team for the very positive start to the Audit. He congratulated RH and the senior team on the very positive financial position.

10. Health, Safety and Wellbeing update

SF reported to Trustees that Health and Safety briefings were underway for new starters and the new Elected Officer team, with refresher sessions for longer serving staff to encourage better housekeeping habits.

Focus is also on Martyn's Law legislation which comes in on 3rd April 2027. Ongoing work is underway with UH and local counter-terrorism authorities, particularly in respect of The Forum and open-air gatherings, to undertake risk assessments and finalise procedures.

In response to UM, SF noted that he would report back with a more detailed update at the next Board meeting after Start of Term activities have completed.

SF also confirmed that the Sexual Harassment Risk Assessment has been added to HSU's Risk Register. This is being implemented with staff and external contractors.

11. Appointments

Appointment of Deputy Chair

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

Appointment of Student Governor

Trustees approved JAh to serve as Student Governor.

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

RS confirmed that he would serve as Chair for this academic year, with BW serving as the External Trustee representative.

People Committee

UM confirmed that he would serve as Chair for this academic year, with CBr serving as the External Trustee representative.

RH encouraged all Elected Officers and Student Trustees to attend both Sub-Committees if possible, noting that they would provide valuable learning opportunities. KM will ensure all Trustees have dates of the meetings this year.

12. AOB

HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information.

Other

RS thanked the Officer Trustees and Student Trustees for their engagement at today's meeting. He said he had been very impressed by their level of insight and contributions, noting that active participation like this makes meetings so productive and valuable.

Meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, 14th October 2025

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

Thursday, 13th November 2025

Thursday, 19th February 2026

Thursday, 16th April 2026

Thursday, 14th May 2026