



**University of Hertfordshire Students' Union Board of Trustees Meeting
Thursday, 19th February 2026 on campus and via MS Teams**

Present:

- Jubair Ahmed (JAh)
- Charmagne Barnes (CBa)
- 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)*
- Libby Freeman, *People and Development Manager, HSU (LF)* in part
- 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 and welcomed Trustees to today’s discussions.

2. Apologies for absence

- Judith Albert
- Mariangel Briceno Riverol
- Cynthia Bryan
- Furqan Miah

Non-Attendance

Hauwa Jijwa

3. Declarations of Interest

None noted.

4. Minutes of previous meetings

KM noted that RS’s apologies had been omitted from the minutes of the last meeting. She offered her apologies and said this oversight would be corrected before publication. The Board of Trustees

Signed Dated

then approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13th November 2025.

5. CEO Update

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

- The EleHouse reopening has been front and centre for the team recently and SF will brief the Board later in the meeting.
- RH drew the Board's attention to Appendix 1b – Advice and Support Centre Engagement Report for January 2026. She noted a slower start to the year for the team than anticipated but highlighted that activity had picked up pace across the Semester. Operationally, the team has strengthened referral pathways and introduced more proactive outreach and data-sharing arrangements with the University to improve early intervention and visibility of support.
- LP and her team are continuing to review employment practices to ensure compliance and to understand any operational implications under the Employment Rights Bill. This is being discussed at the People Committee as elements of the Bill become law.

6. Elected Officer Report

The Board received the Elected Officer report from JAh. BW thanked JAh and noted exciting progress on issues around the UNO bus service.

7. January 2026 Management Accounts

The Board received the January 2026 Management Accounts. LP highlighted the following:

- Expectation is to achieve a year-end position in line with budget.
- There have been some salary savings and internships are planned across Events and Marketing to use these monies over the summer period.
- Commercial have put some money aside for an end-of-year event and there has, of course, been expenditure on the EleHouse reopening. Stock that can be used will be transferred from The Forum for reuse. The Private Hire business continues to grow and perform well.
- A deficit position is noted in some areas due to the time lag in the reclaim income from UH for Herts Unfiltered and SCOs. A payment has been received since publication of the Accounts.

8. University Update

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

- Registrations for Semester B. These have been slower than anticipated due to the issues around visas, targeted against Bangladeshi and Pakistani students. UH will now commence teaching on 27th February to offer students more time to arrive. Financial implications are being worked through.
- NSS. So far, the response rate stands at 28.64% (33% last year at the same point). CBa said that she hoped that it was the Reading Week that had slowed responses. She noted the

mileage in achieving a high response rate and she urged colleagues, who have the influence, to encourage students to complete the survey.

- Pulse Survey. This new survey replaced the end of module survey last year. Currently, a poor response rate stands at 16.8% but CBa said she has asked for the Pulse Survey to be left open for a further week to negate the impact of Reading Week. She noted that these key areas of student feedback are non-negotiable for UH and are reported back on as part of the OfS conditions of registrations.
- Director of Academic Quality. Dr Andrew Mitchell will take up this post at the beginning of April, having previously worked for the University of Bedfordshire. He brings a strong background in regulation, compliance and improvement.
- Task and Finish Group looking at a Campus fit for UH Students. CB thanked UH for their support in the EleHouse project and to HSU for processing the reopening so quickly.
- Accommodation. For the next run of Accommodation services for Semester A, more staff will be in attendance to resolve issues across moving-in weekend, along with a food truck and music to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.
- Herts Unfiltered. CBa will be reviewing the frequency, timeliness, question set etc of Herts Unfiltered with HSU to ensure that it does not subsume or detract from the broader, more established surveys.

UM and LF joined the meeting at 4.30 pm.

9. HR, Training and Development Update

The Board received a presentation from LF on student leadership training. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- LF noted that the framework and principles are applicable to all forms of leadership training be it student, Trustee etc.
- RS asked how the cohort for the training were identified. LF replied that the training was for any student leader requiring support and that the framework can be applied to the whole population.
- RS went on to ask how the training was scheduled. LF said that the training is delivered before the start of term, but the team is exploring introducing 'refresher' training through the academic year. This will have the aim of bringing students back to reflect on their progress and to reinforce the development and application of soft skills gained through their roles. RS said it would be good, going forward, to hear directly from student leaders about their experience in the programme.
- RS asked about the role of mentors. PD said that this sits outside the scope of the programme and is considered on a role-by-role basis.
- LF highlighted that there has been a member of student staff involved in the development of the programme. Her experiences have been fundamental in the research and design of the framework.
- BW noted that ongoing development, after initial training, is critical. LF said that the annual Student Leader Conference provides just such an opportunity for students to network, and to discuss roles and progress. BW went on to say that this represents an important first step in inspiring a lasting love of learning.
- JAh asked if this training offered any form of certification that could be publicised via LinkedIn etc. LF said that there has been mixed engagement with this when provided in the past and it is therefore very much dependent on the training course being undertaken.

LF left the meeting at 4.45 pm.

10. Semester A Impact Overview

The Board received a presentation from SF on Semester A. SF noted that Semester A represented a strong period of delivery and visibility for HSU. Notably, engagement is up across all events (alcohol and non-alcohol led), societies, student representation and student insight (primarily driven by Herts Unfiltered). Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked about the themes coming to the Advice and Support Centre. PD replied that students are coming with familiar issues but the concentration changes year on year. Tuition fee debt is a frequent topic raised. The ASC team make sure that students are connected with the UH Finance team, and also the Wellbeing unit if it triggers that level of response.
- CBa highlighted the Student Voice Panel that manages all student surveys and student voice.
- JAh asked about harassment and anti-social behaviours at The Forum events during Semester A. SF said there had been a slight downturn in incidents compared to last year. Security are briefed and trained to handle these situations, and disciplinary incidents followed up by the Dean of Students, with a ban from the venue where appropriate.

11. EleHouse Update

The Board received a presentation from SF on the reopening of the EleHouse, with acknowledgement of the significant scope and effort involved. Highlights of the subsequent discussion included:

- RS asked if there were any liabilities transferring over to HSU. SF replied that the form of the agreement for the EleHouse with UH is similar to that of The Forum ie HSU operate the space and take over responsibility and liabilities for running events, but certain Health and Safety / equipment checks sit with UH.
- UM asked whether the EleHouse would fall under the current insurance policy for HSU or be added on. LP replied that it does indeed need to be added on and this will incur additional cost.
- SF thanked the HSU team for their phenomenal efforts in bringing this project to fruition.
- In turn, both BW and RS congratulated SF and his team on such impressive work and acknowledged the significant achievement on this project. BW also thanked UH for their support in the successful delivery of this outcome.

12. Board Effectiveness Review Update

The Board received a paper from RH outlining an effectiveness review of the HSU Board of Trustees undertaken in November 2025.

RH said that a high degree of confidence had been fed back from these Trustee discussions. However, there are several opportunities to pursue which now form an Action Plan, to be reviewed at future Board Meetings.

As part of the review, a benchmarking exercise was undertaken to understand Trustee Board meeting frequency and committee structures across the sector. The Articles of Association dictate that the Board meet six times a year, condensed into an academic year. Most competitor set unions hold a minimum of four full Trustee Board meetings per year, with some meeting three or five times a year. Sub-Committees are broadly comparable to HSU. It was therefore recommended that HSU adopt a formal meeting structure of four full Trustee Board meetings per year from the 2026-27 academic cycle. RS said he was in favour as long as the schedule broadly mapped key priorities and approvals through the year. UM agreed, noting that it was important not to lose the content of meetings, particularly given that one meeting a year is always dedicated to a review of the Audit. BW further agreed, saying that this was a sensible approach. He noted that, on occasion, Board meetings may have to be extended to allow more time for discussion and that he would like Trustees to continue to receive briefings from the operational management team.

The plan to move to four full Trustee Board meetings per year was duly approved by Trustees.

RH thanked the Board, noting that the Articles of Association will require updating and will come to the Board for approval at the next meeting

13. HSU Schedule of Compliance

The Board received the Annual Statement of Legal Compliance 2025-26.

UM asked for clarification on the data sharing agreement as part of HSU's Memorandum of Understanding, currently noted as 'under review'. RH replied that this has been temporarily delayed by a change of staff in UH's Legal team, but the matter is progressing.

UM went on to check his understanding that the Guest Speaker Policy is in the process of being reviewed. RH said that the team have been waiting for the finalisation of UH's Guest Speaker Policy which was changed in line with the Freedom of Speech (Higher Education) Bill). This has now been completed and HSU are in the process of reviewing the policy.

RS asked if there were any new compliance issues coming. RH replied that new and updated policies coming out of the Employment Rights Bill are in hand but not currently added to the schedule as HSU is not yet accountable for this.

14. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Update

The Board received an update from SF on Health, Safety and Wellbeing. SF highlighted the following:

- HSU are in the process of reviewing the reports coming out of the Fire Risk Assessment recently undertaken by UH. These will be incorporated into HSU's own risk assessments, and the team will work with UH to rectify any actions arising.
- UH have recently circulated guidance on the Annual Assurance Report. SF will be completing this on behalf of HSU.
- There have been a few incidents of violence and verbal abuse occurring in The Forum at the start of Semester B, slightly up at 12 this year (7 at the same point last year).

15. Appointment of Elections Returning Officer

PD updated the Board on the role of the Elections Returning Officer, who provides independent assurance to the Elections process. The Board was asked to approve the appointment of the National Union of Students as the Returning Officer for the upcoming Elections cycle and Trustees duly gave approval.

16. 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.

HSU Staff Newsletter

The Board received the HSU Staff Newsletter for information.

Enterprises Governance Review

The Board received a paper on the Enterprises Governance Review.

LP reported that following the external audit of UHSU Enterprises Ltd (September 2025), auditors identified a minor governance observation around the number of Directors for UHSU Enterprises Ltd. Enterprises Ltd has two Directors, both of whom are paid members of staff of the parent charity. While this structure is legally compliant, the auditors noted that it does not provide independent oversight and presents a perceived conflict of interest. The audit recommended that the Board consider appointing an independent Trustee or Director.

LP set out the options: to maintain the current arrangements, to recruit an external individual with no existing relationship to HSU to sit on the Enterprises Ltd Board, or to nominate a Trustee from the main HSU Board to act as Directors of Enterprises Ltd, providing oversight and reporting to the Trustee Board. This is in line with Charity Commission guidance. She had recommended the latter option, nominating Cynthia Bryan to become the Trustee representative and that she has agreed. This had been approved at the recent People Committee and she asked the Trustee Board to ratify this decision. The Board duly approve the appointment of Cynthia Bryan to the Enterprises Ltd Board.

Meeting closed at 5.30 pm.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 16th April 2026
Dates for 2025/26 academic year – all meetings run from 4.00 pm to 6.00 pm

Thursday, 14th May 2026