



02Trustee Board minutes

14-12-23

Action

4 GOVERNANCE

Attendance

4.1 Present

Ashley Corey (Lay trustee)

Richard Halderthay (Lay trustee)

Muneeb Iqbal (Officer trustee and Chair)

Teresa Jordan (Lay trustee and Vice Chair)

Neelima Muraleedharan-Menon (Officer trustee)

Nithin Raj (Officer trustee)

Arya Shaji (Officer trustee)

Adora Siqueira (Officer trustee)

Richard Watson (Lay trustee)

In attendance

Tony Bickley (Director of Commercial & Communications (DCC))

Linda Collett (Clerk)

Rose Guy (Strategic projects manager (SPM) – items 5.1 and 5.2 only)

John Valerkou (CEO)

Ewen Wilson (Senior Governance & Projects Manager (SGPM))

Elliot Wollen (SU President, Writtle and observer, items 1-7 only)

4.2 Apologies

Sian Myers (Lay trustee)

4.3 Absent

None

4.4 Declaration of interest

Item 5.3 – Elliot Wollen

It was noted that some changes had been effected on the format of the meeting and that any feedback would be useful.

Acceptance of the minutes from the previous meeting on

4.5 Accuracy

The previous minutes were accepted as a true record.

4.6 Matters Arising

16-25.2 – Action 1 – SGPM was working on a student-friendly, interactive version of the

EW(1)

inclusion strategy which was scheduled to be complete by the end of January.

2.1 – Action 6 – The strategic project update gave a broad overview of the project spends but was more of a strategic project progression update than financial oversight point of view.

2.2 – 7 – Action 7 – SGPM was still working on the mental health research project which had experienced some delays, but it was hoped that the draft report would be available before the February Board meeting.

EW(2)

2.3 – Action 9 – The web developer had been recruited within the original budget and was due to take up their role in January. The role did not include any app development: if this was needed it would be a separate project and would be bought in from an external source. Thanks were extended to Ashley Corey for his assistance in recruiting this role.

3.2 – Action 13 – The Board requested that the CEO circulate a fortnightly update as agreed at the previous Board meeting, even if there was nothing new to report.

JV(3)

AOB – Action 19 – The Director of Membership Services had been appointed and would take up the role after a three month notice period.

## 5 STRATEGY

### 5.1 KPI performance update

It was noted that the overarching KPI had not been included in this paper. The first quartile Alterline results would be available in January so a further update would be circulated to members before it was brought to the February Board meeting. NSS results would not be available until summer 2024. It was noted that it was difficult to assess progress until the results of the respective surveys were available.

RG(4)

The senior management team (SMT) had reviewed the KPIs and had agreed that they were the right measures. However, the measurement for “Broadening your horizons” was not on target so further work was being undertaken to establish how this could be pushed to achieve the target, or to understand why the target was not being achieved.

SMT(5)

The Board expressed concern over the challenge of belonging given the complex mix of campuses, particularly regarding the Writtle merger. The Writtle president confirmed that this should be of concern, as Writtle students had a strong sense of belonging to the Writtle campus and many had specifically chosen it for its niche courses and small classes and may be unhappy at being part of a much larger institution.

Although the number of students at Writtle was comparatively small and would not significantly impact on the overall percentages, it would be important to measure their sense of belonging after the merger. It was confirmed that the Alterline data could be segmented in order to provide this information. It was agreed that it would be important to preserve the identity and uniqueness of Writtle post-merger, whilst ensuring that Writtle students feel part

of the wider ARU community and it was suggested that a collective discussion by the Board on Writtle would be needed.

JV(6)

It was noted that both the London and Peterborough campuses had recently undertaken campus-specific projects and successfully spoken to the needs of their students, and that Peterborough in particular, would provide an excellent role model for what Writtle would look like.

A series of drop-ins with both the CEO, officers and the Writtle president had taken place at Writtle to gather student feedback and concerns, of which there were many. This information had been shared with the University but as they were still unsure of the model, they had done little to reassure the student body.

It was agreed that the report in its current format as a project highlight report was very valuable on focusing on what milestones had been achieved. However, it would be useful to see a Union-wide balanced score card as a performance measurement tool which demonstrated how the KPIs were interacting with each other. It was agreed that the SPM would meet with the lay trustee from Imperial to gain feedback and discuss the balanced score cards.

RG/AC(7)

It was noted that, although the full data report against which the KPIs were measured was only available once a year, pulse surveys were produced three times a year, and monthly updates were also available. It was further noted that each project manager was now being asked to set a KPI that related to a strategic aim.

There was also concern that there was insufficient focus on some areas of the strategic aims. The SMT recognised that there were areas that need more focus and had been working on identifying opportunities to put in motion over the next twelve months to drive forward the strategic aims.

SMT(8)

The Board questioned whether unengaged students could give meaningful responses to the questions about Union services. The SPM noted that Alterline could be asked segment responses to establish which students had actually used the services in order to establish the validity behind them.

RG(9)

## 5.2 Strategic project update

It was noted that there was scope to develop the workshops for staff to include writing KPIs and balancing projects across the strategic aims. The Board requested that a background document be included in the papers to explain all the projects and the basis of scoring.

RG(10)

## 5.3 Complex project balanced score cards

The SPGM noted that certain large change projects warranted a more detailed brief to the

Board.

### **Mental health research project**

The overall status for this project was amber due to a push back on the timeline. It was now scheduled to be completed by the end of January. Although there had been issues with IT and obtaining sufficient engagement in the surveys and focus groups had been challenging, these were now complete, and the results were being analysed. Almost 450 students had engaged with the project and some themes were emerging around specific recommendations that would be needed for hard-to-reach student groups. Next steps would be concluding the research and analysis and preparing a draft report for feedback.

EW(11)

It was agreed that the format of the reports was excellent, and the Board expressed interest in seeing more of these for other projects, with these being aggregated and brought to the Board on a quarterly basis, and any projects that are off track being brought to the Board by escalation, followed by an end of year summary. However, it was suggested that the report be renamed as a project highlight report, rather than a balanced score card.

EW(12)

### **EDI**

Despite having made a lot of progress, with students identified to join the group and a programme of work outlined, the overall status for this project was amber as there was a still challenge in getting students to attend meetings.

### **Writtle merger**

A lot of work had already been undertaken, and the TUPE process was now underway, with individual consultations due to take place next week. However, until the financial envelope was agreed with the University, no further progress could be made, so the overall status of the project was amber, and the funding element remained as red. The Board indicated that the issue of overall cost and the risk to the organisation associated with it, should make the overall status red.

EW(13)

Concern was expressed that there was no reference to FE students or to the commercial offering and that the information provided to the three sub-committees appeared to be inconsistent. It was agreed that the SPGM would include these elements.

#### **5.3.1 Additional funding request for mental health research project**

The push back in the timeline for completion of the project had resulted in the need for a further £5,000 to complete the project.

A vote was taken and the additional funding of £5,000 was unanimously AGREED.

### **5.4 Risk register**

It was noted that several of the top ten risks were around the Writtle merger.

#### 1213 – Possibility of running a bar at Writtle

The University would like the SU to take over the running of the bar and café at Writtle but there were some inconsistencies in the financial reporting which made it difficult to establish what level of income there was currently. It was suggested that if the Union did undertake the running of these services, it should be on the same model as the cafes at Young Street and Compass House, with no financial risk to the Union.

Concern had been expressed by sub-committees over the stretch on the current commercial team, but it was agreed that it would be a shame to lose the opportunities at Writtle. These spaces were very important to Writtle students due to the more remote nature of the campus and if they were SU spaces this would contribute to the sense of community and belonging.

Further concern was expressed over the risk of a reduction in student numbers affecting the Union's income. This risk was included in the committee risks but had not reached the top ten organisational risks. This would be further discussed outside of the meeting.

JV/MI(14)

## 6 BUSINESS UPDATE

### 6.1 CEO update

The CEO noted that the role of Director of Membership Services had now been recruited. The recruitment process had gone smoothly and the service from Atkinson's had been very good.

The successful candidate was Steve Owen, previously Director of Services at Hertford SU for the past three years. The key drivers for the role were stability and management for the team, the ability to drive change and to build relationships with the University, along with delivery to the Board. It was expected that they would start the role in March after a three-month notice period. The first focus would be in looking at the KPIs and the NSS questions, and in developing the opportunities that had been identified.

It was further noted that the University had been nominated for, and had won the Times Higher Education "University of the year" award. This should, along with the earlier TEF gold award, have a positive impact on recruitment.

However, there were still several areas where the University was below the benchmark, particularly in the black/white attainment gap and on continuation. The NSS does not pick up on post-grad students, of which there are large numbers at ARU, so there was a considerable lack of data from this area, and there were continuing challenges with student accommodation

which the University were working to address.

## **6.2 Finance report**

### **2022-23 accounts**

The Chair of the finance and risk committee noted that the figures for 2022-23 were only draft as there had not been sufficient quality data from the University finance department on which to base a detailed report.

The year had ended with a larger than expected surplus. 92 had experienced a successful year but was down on budget due to rising cost of sales and staffing costs, and VAT exemption on hot food. HMRC had ruled that 92 should charge VAT on hot food, and NUS had paid for legal advice to challenge this ruling. A judge was now considering the case which had a potential financial impact of approximately £35,000 on the Union. The auditors were currently undertaking a VAT audit as there were concerns that the University finance department may have made some errors.

### **Management accounts 2023-24**

Cash flow was favourable

### **Finance SLA**

This document had been work in progress for some time and would continue to evolve but now needed Board approval.

A vote was taken and the Finance SLA was unanimously **AGREED**.

### **Reserves policy**

This had been written to work in tandem with the scheme of delegated authority, which included a list of delegates that could be used in the absence of an authorised person.

A vote was taken and the reserves policy was unanimously **AGREED**.

### **Scheme of delegated authority**

This had been amended to include a list of delegates that could be used in the absence of an authorise person.

A vote was taken and the scheme of delegated authority was unanimously **AGREED**.

## **6.3 Officer campaigns update**

These would be covered in item 7 below.

## **6.4 Sub-committee updates**

### **6.4.1 Appointments and governance**

There were no questions to the Chair of the A&G committee

#### 6.4.2 Finance and risk

This had been covered in 6.2 above. There were no questions to the Chair of the F&R committee.

#### 6.4.3 HR and Employee engagement

The following points had been discussed at the last meeting:

- HR KPIs
- Writtle
- Wellness group activities
- New HR software system. Both career and student staff data were now held on one system. The switch had been a great deal of work and the provider had not delivered as promised, which had put a lot of pressure on the HR administrator. The HR team were commended for their work, and it was suggested that the administrator be recognised with a bonus payment. JV(15)
- Appraisal process for CEO – There was currently no process for this, and the CEO’s objectives had not been reviewed for some years, so the HR&EE Chair would be reaching out to lay trustees for their input in due course. SM(16)
- Visa and healthcare support for international officers – Charges had increased significantly since this policy was agreed and would be reviewed on a regular basis.
- Staff bonuses – A proposal to make a one-off cost of living payment to staff in January had been agreed by the committee. CEO to circulate details to the Board JV (17)
- Proposal to set up remuneration committee – This would be taken to the A&G committee for approval before being brought to the Board JV(18)

## 7 STUDENT VOICE

This was a new item with officers providing details of what was current in their faculties on a rotational basis, as well as updates on their three main campaigns.

### 7.1 Nithin Raj – VP HeMS

- International night – to promote global and cultural awareness. The night was attended by more than 50 students but the majority were Indian students. The intention had been for the night to be attended by students from all over the world so for the next planned event in trimester two, the VP HeMS would be working with societies to increase the diversity of students who engage with the event.
- Voter registration – to ensure all students who are entitled to vote have registered for next year’s general election. The VP HeMS attended the NUS Manifesto summit and shared student feedback. Next trimester he would be undertaking an elections campaign to promote voter registration and the general election.
- Student entrepreneur marketplace – an opportunity for students to showcase their cultural food and sell goods. Positive feedback was received but students also indicated

that they would like speaker sessions, networking events and business gain, so these would be prioritised for the second event in trimester 2.

## 7.2 Neelima Mulareedharan-Menon – VP B&L

- Placement assistance – Collaborating with the University employability service to increase students' visibility by reaching out to employers through platforms such as LinkedIn, and by assisting with writing CVs and applications, interview techniques and mock sessions. The sessions would be held starting 18 February, in the student spaces, as these are spaces that students already use. They would be followed by feedback and review sessions.
- Advocating for reduced class sizes – Class sizes, particularly in the B&L faculty, were very large and, although reduced class sizes with tutor-led sessions had been trialled, it was felt that more student-led sessions would be useful.
- ARU Peterborough – Some students had been expecting to be in Cambridge but had been moved to Peterborough at the last minute. This had resulted in dissatisfaction as they felt they were paying the same fees but with reduced services available to them. Some form of compensation such as gym or club memberships was being sought for these students.

## 7.3 Adora Siqueira – VP S&E

- Interdepartmental competitions – Trimester one had seen FIFA and chess competitions, which had been well attended, although the Chelmsford chess competition had been cancelled due to the train strikes. Trimester two would concentrate more on painting, dancing and singing competitions, mocktail making and quiz nights, followed by sports competitions such as football, basketball and cricket.
- Cost of living – Hot chocolate was handed out for national cocoa day and attempts were being made to expand the free fruit basket campaign over faculty buildings.
- Feedback from faculty forums had included requests for an innovation hub and a student exchange programme.

## 7.4 Arya Shaji – VP AHES

- Campaigns largely shared with VP HeMS and VP B&L
- Feedback from faculty forum was largely around the cost of living. Students wanted to sell their work to provide extra income, so initially winter markets were arranged for students to sell to other students. There were further plans to expand into a city centre shop so that students could sell their work to the public. Arts students were also looking at redesigning the hoodies on sale in the SU shops.

# 8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

## 8.1 Briefing to the Board following recent emergency Board meetings

The action coming out of the meetings was to reflect, review, take learnings and bring an action plan back to the Board.



The additional point of contact for officers in key learning 8 would be the SPGM. EW(19)

Feedback had been taken from members and the attached action plan had been formulated.

Action 1 – This action had already been started.

Action 2 – Informal relationships were being developed to facilitate this action. EW(20)

Action 3 – This action would be undertaken by the Comms manager, taking into account the legal guidance offered by NUS and Bates Wells solicitors. It was noted that the legal guidance had stated that officers could make a statement with the support of a student mandate, but as officers, not as the ARU SU Board. KM(21)

Action 4 – These meetings already take place and both participants are committed to continuing them.


Action 5 – This action would be facilitated by the Engagement manager should the officers demonstrate the wish to issue a revised statement.

The Board noted there should be a link between the recommendations and the inclusion strategy and that it was important to have a good framework going across all policies. The equality impact assessment would be brought to the next Board. EH(22)

It was further noted that the SU had a responsibility to provide emotional support to officers and students in such emotive situations. EW(23)

It was agreed that the emergency Board meetings highlighted the need for student trustees to provide the student voice and the lack of guidance for officer trustees on a code of ethics. It was further agreed that this was a large piece of work which would need more thought before it came back to the Board. The Board requested that the CEO keep the Board informed of any potential situation so that any conflict could be resolved swiftly and before further actions were needed. MI/JV(24)0  
JV(25)

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING  
Thursday 29 February 2024 – 2.00-5.00 pm  
[Click here to join the meeting](#)

Signature   
Position PRESIDENT / CHAIR  
Date: 29/02/2024

