

03 April 2023
Board of Trustees
Minutes of Meeting (Non-Confidential)

Present:	<div> <div>Laura Tamara</div> <div>Co-President</div> </div> <div> <div>Quadri Yusuf</div> <div>Co-President (Chair)</div> </div> <div> <div>Ryan Murphy</div> <div>Co Vice President</div> </div> <div> <div>Tabitha Ajao</div> <div>Co Vice President</div> </div> <div> <div>John Dix</div> <div>External Trustee</div> </div> <div> <div>Tania Struetzel</div> <div>External Trustee</div> </div> <div> <div>Dan Login</div> <div>External Trustee</div> </div> <div> <div>Beverley Hoare</div> <div>University of Bedfordshire Trustee</div> </div>
Attending:	<div> <div>Mark McCormack</div> <div>CEO</div> </div> <div> <div>Ann Binks (minute taker)</div> <div>Head of Finance and Resources (minute taker)</div> </div> <div> <div>Amy McLaughlan</div> <div>Head of Membership Services & Engagement</div> </div>
Apologise	<div> <div>Paida Mash</div> <div>External Trustee</div> </div> <div> <div>Fiona McFeeley</div> <div>Student Trustee</div> </div>
Date	3 rd April 2023 3.00pm to 5.45 pm
Location	Zoom

1: Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everybody and noted apologies from Paida Mash and Fiona McFeeley.

2: Governance Matters to discuss

Governance changes had been discussed by staff and Sabbs with plans now in place to consult with Members on changes to the Byelaws. CEO advised that the Memorandum and Articles of Association was due for its five-year review by the Board as well as by the University – this would occur in 2023-24 following the upcoming Member consultation.

HOM explained to the trustees the vast majority of changes will be familiar i.e. petition-style policies sent by circulation to enable asynchronous, digital engagement on issues-based agendas. Consultation with other students' unions suggested a quorum response of 1% was most common – many unions were reviewing the quorum of democratic policy-making by students in response to shifts in political engagement among student bodies more generally. 1% for Beds SU would equate to ~ 105 students. The most significant proposed change was likely to be a restructuring of the officer team; a variety of options were being considered internally. If time at end of the meeting, current ideas would be shared. A meeting is scheduled with the Sabbatical officers to further discuss the proposed changes.

3: Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 08 December 2022 were agreed.

4: Conflicts of interest

A standing conflict of interests around CEO performance review and a staffing review is on the agenda and it was noted that staff are in the room. SLT advised that they are more than happy to step out of the meeting if the trustees wish to discuss these agenda items in confidence.

5: Matters Arising/Outstanding Actions

Actions
Develop a top level contingency plan in the event of a severe reduction in charity income. The CEO has circulated a contingency plan but as it was hypothetical they have not gone into fine details. Completed.

6. Update on Strategic review and Block grant

This item was taken first to allow maximum time for discussion. The CEO presented the Board with a series of slides showing the Block Grant strategy for this year, referring to University grant funds requested for 2023-24, and the factors underpinning it. The plans focussed heavily on enhancing the Beds SU NSS score, albeit it was acknowledged that the SU's current score was above average and that not all students complete the NSS – plans were therefore applicable across the Membership despite benchmarks referring to the NSS score. The CEO also advised a level of unpredictability with the NSS.

There were character traits of some students' unions that could be related to their NSS score with clear demographic themes emerging. For example, larger universities tend to have poorer NSS scores as younger students tend to be more critical. Yet some of the better-performing students' unions in the NSS had student memberships similar to Beds SU (e.g. similar course profiles and age demographic) and their noteworthy membership engagement initiatives were akin to those set out in the existing SU strategic plan.

A funding request outline was set out identifying investment areas and priorities within the strategic plan for both strength-enhancing and development needs.

The CEO provided an overview of the current political context at the university regards to the funding request. The Board wanted reassurance that the strategic plan could still be delivered if no extra funding was received and it was confirmed that it could be.

The trustees noted an informative presentation and supported the direction of travel around the relationships and culture, though felt that the SU could risk skirting around its strategic challenges. If all the enablers were not in place, such as with staffing resource and support for 'brilliant' representatives, the SU faced limitations in the extent to which the strategy could achieve its full potential.

Do we need to look at the MOU? Is during the Block grant process a good moment to have this conversation? The CEO replied that evaluating the MOU is a very good idea.

The trustees supported the grant strategy as presented.

7: CEO Report

Report taken as read. The CEO emphasised the relief and importance of being within reach of a full permanent staffing complement. The new Representation and Engagement Manager making a proactive and promising start, evident in the elections exercise and coming governance changes.

Varsity last week was a great event and communications activity is bigger than they have been for a while, and the 135% year-on increase in student enquiries was noted. Early review of the IIP and employee engagement surveys show staff remain with a very positive outlook on their employment, the SU and its strategy and their managers and leaders. Few questions show a decline on the previous results; the CEO was particularly pleased with a long-awaited turnaround in the sustainability metric.

The CEO referred to the circulated paper poor engagement with Bedford students and the campus context. SLT is unsure of the direction that should be taken in regards to managing The Hub operations, but felt an approach was beginning to emerge through dialogue – greater student consultation was needed in 23-24.

The Board congratulated SLT on retaining IIP silver accreditation.

The Board were advised that the UOB had emailed their staff end of February advising of an advance on next year's pay agreement, brought forward to March. We had not communicated it to staff yet as we are waiting for the University to confirm the additional grant, but will be as soon as it is confirmed.

The Board queried the timeline of the new staff structure and were advised that the roles would go out for recruitment when the Union is back from the Easter break. New appointments were budgeted from June.

8: Strategic Measures progress report

The CEO advised that they were still working their way round some Strategic Measures since LR is no longer at the Union and there are a couple that LR would usually have tracked down. The course rep figure is now revised and we are disappointed in the number of students reps that have been trained. However, we have been a 'Student Engagement Coordinator' down and the Student Experience Leader experiment that the University undertook has not gone well. It took us to February to get 90% of reps, so this shows us that's its possible; but next steps are to see this achieved much earlier. We have made good progress with direct engagements with course reps; are very happy with the inductions; and have seen an upturn in our website engagements. Last year's reduction was due to the fall in the % rate of students opening their emails and the previous summer's transition to a new website and email server.

The Board questioned the progress and future of Project Outreach and were advised that the project will be going ahead and that a graduate will be doing this who is starting with us the

week after next. The placement is for six weeks and they will be setting up the project but it will not be up to the level of engagement that we hoped. In the new structure, responsibility for this project will be allocated to a middle manager.

9: Risk Register

The risk register has been changed with reference to the discussions in the last meeting with representation being moved up the register and the campus closures being added, these risks are categorised as medium.

10: Strategic discussion- With you on your journey

The CEO advised that this is an agenda item where the trustees can talk through one of our strategic themes. Strategic themes will be discussed: an open space to discuss how we add value and support students and query energy and resource allocation across our plans and activities. This meeting theme is "With you when you need support". Students know about our advice service and it is included in course inductions. A benchmark is that in the survey three out of four students would come to us if they needed support. The CEO asked the trustees how well do you think the SU provides support, what do we do well and are there any gaps?

The Board felt that in terms of advice when students engage with it they find it highly valuable but they have noticed in conversations during elections students are not always aware of the service, though it is advertised very well on the website.

The Union needs to collect data to show how we are supporting students on their journey. We also have commuter students who may be currently under engaged.

Another trustee also commented that they felt that SU were doing everything they could but were concerned that the University does not realise we need their support. Students come to us with everything but their main issues are with the University. We have such a wide student body we need to cater for and felt that transport from other campuses would really help with engagement.

The CEO advised that the Board's discussion had given them lots of "food for thought." The role between SU and the University is not always that clear and sometimes students see us in the same light as the University.

The trustees wondered whether, now these issues have been identified, what we are going to do with them? Maybe identify one topic that we can work with UOB on, it is always better to go with a proposal and been seen as proactive.

ACTION: The Board would be interested in seeing a demographic report on the students engaging with the Advice service. They also wondered if Advice has the capacity to deal with all the issues and if not, perhaps the Union needs to consider long-term solutions for emerging service challenges. For example utilising case studies over time to pinpoint fault errors in process, policy and student experiences. Is there capacity in the University to take a long view, to see what has gone wrong with the student experience and look for solutions?

HOM advised that the new middle manager should be able to pick up the issues discussed. Ideally, the Union would be working with the University to improve the student experience particularly with the new engagement and monitoring coming in.

The University trustee advised that they did not have much more to add other than to support what has been discussed.

The CEO advised that when cases were broken down, up to 95% of them are Academic appeals. Are there things that we should be doing?

A trustee commented that they had some concerns regarding overlap advice given by the Union and University. It was noted that the SU Advice service is shown very well in our website but very well hidden in the University's website.

It was highlighted to the trustees that there is a big issue signposting the right person to the right advice which has seen a big increase in the number of students contacting us. The trustees enquired if the Union automatically sends out a survey to students who have accessed our service and they were advised that yes this did happen. They thought this could be a very good tool to go back to University with and were advised that it would be as if a student is dissatisfied in the way a complaint has been handled it is with the University and not the Union.

11: Approve Audit Accounts 2022.23

The chair of the Finance Committee advised that they had heard the Auditors report at the Finance Committee meeting and were happy with it and were recommending that The Board approved the audited accounts for Year Ending July 2022.

The Board **approved** the audited accounts for Year Ending July 2022.

12: Sabbatical Team Update

Vice President Ryan advised they were working on a paper about the sports provision. Feedback so far was that it was not being promoted to Luton students. Get Active engagement data is also not very clear. It is funded by tuition fees but about 200 staff use it. We are rolling out questionnaire to get more feedback. The Sabbatical team are also focusing on how we can improve the provision at Bedford and how we monitor engagement there.

Co-President Laura commented on facilities and the need for the Union to manage expectations with students, but this was an issue on some of the campuses.

Vice President Tabitha advised that they are continuing to hold disability focus groups and is starting a campaign from them. They are preparing for a meeting about a mental health charter and are working alongside Ryan on the sports.

Co-President Quadri advised that they had attended the NUS conference where they had discussed campaigns and policies around the cost of living crisis. In addition, students housing issues and paying fees were on the agenda. Quadri also had an upcoming meeting about placements and welfare for nursing students and how we can improve working together. Students were not always aware of the provision as they had struggled to find out what they could do. Studies show that there is a correlation between continuing on courses and

involvement in Sports. Ryan agreed that they had heard that too and had mentioned it today when they had met the VC.

13: HR Report

The next HR Committee meeting is not until May so there are no minutes to table.

14: CEO Performance

This was tabled as a verbal update, meetings are scheduled with Tania and Laura.

15: Finance Report

The minutes of the Finance Committee were taken as read and the trustees did not have any questions.

16: Report on Sabbatical Officers Elections

Verbal update, which had followed an email briefing from the CEO in March. There had been a few complaints and a disqualification. The Elections are now finished and as far as the Union is concerned complaints completed.

17: Note Impact Report

The Board noted the Impact report and **approved** it.

18: Note on MOU

The Board noted the MOU report and **approved**

19: AOB

The Board advised that they didn't have any AOB.

20: DONM

The Date of the next meeting will be Thursday 29th June 2023.

Actions arising		
<i>Action</i>	<i>By Whom</i>	<i>Completion Date</i>
Demographic report of students engaging with Advice service.	AM	DONM