

Trustee Board Meeting

Monday 6th March 2023

Mandela Room, Guild of Students (Hybrid), 18:00 – 20:00

Present

Robert Smeath, External Trustee **(RS)** **(Chair)**
 Acacia Matthews, Guild President **(President)**
 Vanessa Chigariro, Education Officer **(EO)**
 Florence Craddock, Sports Officer **(SO)**
 Tinajie (Alice) Liu, International Officer **(IO)**
 Reeve Isaacs-Smith, Welfare & Community Officer **(WCO)**
 Isobel Lawson, Activities & Employability Officer **(AEO)**
 Benjamin Lockley, Postgraduate Officer **(PGO)**
 Erica Conway, University Representative Trustee **(EC)**
 Ian Pain, External Trustee **(IP)**
 Yinbo Yu, External Trustee **(YY)** (via Zoom)
 Johnny Davis, External Trustee **(JD)**
 Mitali Gohel, External Trustee **(MG)**
 Kantai Melau, International Student Trustee **(KM)**
 Serabi Opiyo, BAME Student Trustee **(SEO)**
 Alicia Wickert, Postgraduate Student Trustee **(AW)**
 Akram Nazir, Undergraduate Student Trustee **(AN)** (left at 18:20, re-joined at 18:40).

In attendance

Jo Thomas, Chief Executive **(JT)**
 Nick Bailey, Head of Finance **(NB)**
 James Lindsay, Director of Community & Representation **(JL)**
 Scott Dawson, Student Voice and Representation Manager **(SD)** (Agenda Items 11 & 12 only)
 Sam Jones, Executive Assistant **(SJ)** (note taker)

Apologies

Emma Wedge, External Trustee **(EW)**

The Chair welcomed all attendees and the meeting began at 18:10.

No	Item for Discussion	Notes	Action
1	Minutes of Previous Meeting (09.01.23)	The Chair presented the minutes of the previous meeting, dated the 9 th January 2023, for the Board's approval. The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.	Noted Approved
2	Matters Arising	The Chair presented the Trustee Board Action Tracker, for the Board's information. The Trustee Board noted the Trustee Board Action Tracker.	Noted Noted
3	Engagement Committee Minutes (31.01.23)	The AEO presented the Engagement Committee Minutes, dated the 31 st January 2023, for the Board's Approval.	Noted

		<p>The AEO noted a typographical error in the Engagement Committee minutes. SJ to amend.</p> <p>The Committee approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	<p>SJ</p> <p>Approved</p>
4	HR Committee Minutes (02.02.23)	<p>The WCO presented the HR Committee Minutes, dated 2nd February 2023, for the Committee's Approval.</p> <p>The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Approved</p>
5	Audit & Risk Committee (07.02.23)	<p>The EO presented the Audit & Risk Committee Minutes, dated 7th February 2023, for the Board's Approval.</p> <p>The Board approved the minutes as an accurate record of the meeting.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
6	CEO Report	<p>JT presented the CEO Report, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>JT updated the Trustee Board on plans for the recruitment of a new Chair following the expected stepping down of RS in October 2023. JT updated the Board on a recent meeting of Appointments Panel to plan the recruitment, with interviews scheduled for June.</p> <p>JT updated the Board on developments with planned national UCU strike action, noting that strike action had been postponed while negotiations took place through the resolution service ACAS. JD asked about student perceptions of current UCU strike action. The President noted that continuing strike action was being regularly discussed at Guild Officer Group (GOG) meetings. The President noted the possibility for an upcoming referendum on the Guild's stance on strike action, noting that the Guild's current policy was due to shortly expire. The President updated the Trustee Board on recent conversations with the University Executive Board in relation to strike action.</p> <p>JT updated the Trustee Board on progress with the IT project capital works, which had now begun. JT noted that disruption from building work was being minimised through early and weekend working by contractors. JT noted plans to arrange for all staff to work from home for a short period during the Easter vacation to allow building work to progress unhindered for two straight weeks.</p> <p>MG noted the positive work and attendance at UoBE Festival 2023.</p> <p>JT updated the Board on progress with the planned Strategic Communications review.</p> <p>JT updated the Board on the growth in core staff headcount, up from 71 in September 2022 to 80 at the present time, in line with the additional roles commissioned to deliver the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>JT updated the Trustee Board on developments with the Guild's External Memberships procedures since the last meeting, noting that</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>the Trustee Board had approved a statement by email resolution on the 16th February to withdraw External Memberships from new issuance. JT noted that following the publication of the statement, a student-led petition had commenced to retain External Memberships.</p> <p>The PGO asked the Guild’s plan to respond to the student petition. The President noted that the petition had not yet formally presented to them as Guild President, as required in the Bye-Laws. The President noted that they had reached out to meet with several students involved in the petition to explain the Guild’s position and safeguarding concerns. The President noted the importance of student’s safety in relation to External Memberships and the rationale for the Board’s previous decision.</p> <p>The Trustee Board discussed the External Memberships petition and next steps. The President noted that a small number of Guild-affiliated societies which had significant numbers of External Members were particularly concerned about the withdrawal.</p> <p>AN left the meeting at 18:20.</p> <p>The PGO noted their view that the case of External Membership should be resolved by the current Trustee Board, before the departure of the current Full Time Officers. AS noted that approximately 250 External Members were currently registered with the Guild across 67 societies. AS noted that all affected societies had now been contacted to discuss the support options available. AS noted that an unknown number of students were currently on a leave of absence. JT noted that the majority of societies with external members had less than 3 external members. AN asked about the Guild’s process for identifying students on a leave of absence. AS noted that the total number was unknown.</p> <p>YY asked about the issue of External Memberships during the Guild elections. The WCO noted that the issue had been discussed at several candidate hustings but had not been included in any candidate’s manifesto.</p> <p>YY suggested raising the issue of External Memberships early with the incoming Officer team.</p> <p>RS noted their willingness to discuss the issue with concerned students, on the Board’s behalf, if necessary.</p> <p>The Board noted the CEO Report.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
7	Strategic Operations Plan	<p>JT presented the Strategic Operations Plan, for the Board’s Information.</p> <p>JT noted that since the January Board meeting, the Guild’s management team had worked closely on the strategy to update KPI’s in particular the Strategic Operations Plan document for the current ‘Year 1’ of the strategy. JT noted the ‘dialling down’ of some areas of work in the current academic year, including the number of University Committees which the Officer Team were committed to. The Trustee Board discussed the tracked changes in the Strategic Operations Plan.</p>	Noted

		<p>MG asked about the timings of research surveys for monitoring KPI's. JT noted the timing of research and surveys to achieve the highest possible turnout and avoid clashes with University surveys.</p> <p>JD asked about feedback from the University in the recent Compact meeting. JT noted that questions from the University had been challenging and awareness of the Guild's strategic goals had been stronger and more developed. RS noted the value of induction meetings for University staff who would be involved in future Guild Compact processes.</p> <p>EC noted the value of constructive scrutiny of the Guild's strategy and delivery. NB noted detailed discussions on the Guild's case with HMRC. RS noted the benefit of the Guild's 5-year funding settlement with the University. EC noted the importance of a continuing 5-year strategy and budget process on a rolling basis for future. The PGO noted their view that the financial security, and investment by the University in the Guild was lagging behind other Russell Group Universities.</p> <p>SEO noted their recent attendance at a West Midlands student trustees networking event and discussions at that meeting on comparisons between different Students' Union funding arrangements, which had been positive.</p> <p>AN re-joined the meeting at 18:40.</p> <p>JT noted plans for the roll-out of an improvement plan for the Student Rep System (SRS) and support the Guild's Engagement and Representation KPI's. The WCO noted that current engagement data from student reps was very poor and should be a key priority for the Guild to improve. The WCO noted the key role of the Guild as body for academic representation. RS suggested discussing progress on the Student Rep System improvement plan at the July Trustee Board meeting. The PGO noted their plans to focus on the SRS in 2023/24. SJ/JL to include on agenda.</p> <p>The Board noted the Strategic Operations Plan.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>SJ/JL</p>
8	NUS Affiliation Report	<p>JT presented the NUS Affiliation Report, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>JT updated the Trustee Board on developments following the NUS's recent publication of its investigation report into anti-semitism within the organisation.</p> <p>The Board discussed the content of the NUS Affiliation Report, noting the costs and implications for the Guild if it were to disaffiliate from the NUS including purchasing and central billing, staff and Officer training, collective action for students nationally, and collective legal action, most recently on the catering VAT issue. JT noted a range of additional costs and prospective lost revenues if the Guild were to leave the NUS. The PGO noted their view that the Guild would be able to successfully replace all of the services and opportunities provided by the NUS. RS noted the importance of NUS affiliation being a student-led decision. The PGO noted their view that the Guild would be able to thrive outside</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>of the NUS. The EO noted their recent attendance at a Russell Group Student's Unions meeting which had been organised outside of NUS and more beneficial due to the similar size of each organisation.</p> <p>MG asked about the ability of the Guild to re-join the NUS if it chose to disaffiliate, noting that the ability of the Guild to re-join NUS would impact on the decision-making process. The President noted their view that a decision of the Guild to disaffiliate from the NUS would have a detrimental impact on its national standing and influence in the student movement.</p> <p>The President updated the Board on recent meetings of the Russell Group Student's Unions (RGSU) network, which had recently reformed with the support of several large students' unions to provide training and networking for Officers. The President noted the success of recent RGSU lobbying activity and research. JT updated the Board on the Guild's contribution of £2k in 2022/23 to support RGSU staffing.</p> <p>The President updated the Board on recent discussions at Guild Officer Group (GOG) on holding a referendum on NUS membership, which was currently being discussed via email resolution. The President noted discussions on a possible referendum taking place in either April or October 2023. The President noted that, if a referendum on NUS took place, the Officer team's focus would be on informing students of the full context of the Guild's affiliation to NUS.</p> <p>The Board noted the NUS Affiliation Report.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
9	Digital Systems Update	<p>EP joined the meeting at 19:10</p> <p>EP and NB presented the Digital Systems Update, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>NB updated the Board on progress to date on the Guild's Digital Systems project and plan. EP noted updated the Board on work on the Guild's Digital Systems Plan following their start in post in November 2022. NB updated the Board on staff resources for the project, with two core members of staff now in place. EP noted the key role of the Membership Services Limited (MSL) system in delivering the Guild's digital customer platform, and the other systems which integrated into MSL including Staff Savvy, Sage Payroll, the Access payment system, and in time, a transition for the Advice Pro system currently in use in the Guild Advice and Mentors team. EP noted plans to move ahead with full integration of most systems in time for the 2023/24 academic year.</p> <p>EP noted the long-term benefits of fully integrating student data tracking across all of the Guild's services and departments, initially e-ticketing and door entry and in time online students group committee elections and digital systems processing. EP updated the Board on the Digital Plan roll-out timeline.</p> <p>EC noted the positive work on the digital systems project. MG asked about plans to engage staff in the systems transition and communicate the benefits of new systems to staff and students. EP noted further work</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>required on communicating changes to staff. MG noted the benefit of a robust plan to communicate and engage stakeholders in the project. JD noted the value of maximising staff understanding of new systems at the point of roll-out.</p> <p>NB updated the Board on analysis of permission requirements for each core staff role and plans to transition training for core staff. AN asked about consultation with student groups on new systems. EP noted plans for a trial of the digital payment's module with a small number of student groups ahead of a full roll-out. WCO asked about data storage permissions and privacy and the need for more data being held on students. EP noted that the systems team were consulting with an external data advisor, but changes to the Guild's privacy policy and new communications to students may be necessary. JT noted that the Guild's current MSL permissions process was very rigorous. RS noted the value of additional staff training on systems and data security across all levels as new systems were rolled out.</p> <p>SEO asked about e-ticketing in relation to short-notice ticket releases. EP noted that an e-ticketing platform would allow tickets to be sold right up to the time of an event. The SO asked about the specific case of sports night ticket sales and EP agreed to follow up outside the meeting.</p> <p>The Board noted the Digital Systems Update.</p> <p>EP left the meeting at 19:30.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
10	HMRC Update	<p>NB presented the HMRC Update, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>NB updated the Board on developments in the Guild's VAT tribunal case since HMRC had withdrawn, leaving the Guild's successful in its challenge. NB updated the Board on documentation passed between HMRC and the Guild since that time including a consent agreement on the previous 4-year period in question. NB noted that from 2020 onwards, the Guild had accounted for payments through the schemes as 'VAT-able', and would now be seeking to recover these funds from HMRC as well as fund already paid for the period before 2020. NB noted that they had recently submitted the Guild's quarterly returns, amending the Guild's handling of the schemes revenues as non 'VAT-able' for the current financial period.</p> <p>JD asked about future handling of revenues as part of the Residence Life schemes. NB noted that discussions on future governance arrangements for the schemes was taking place with the University. JT noted the importance of having a 'shared language' with the University in future. EC noted the value of looking to incorporate the scheme revenues within the main Guild's block grant move forwards. JT noted that the Guild had now shared news of its success with the wider SU sector.</p> <p>The Board noted their thanks to NB and JT on their successful handling and hard work on the Guild's HMRC case over several years.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		The Board noted the HMRC Update.	Noted
11	Democracy Review Update	<p>SD joined the meeting at 19:45.</p> <p>JT & SD presented the Democracy Review Update, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>JT updated the Board on progress to date on the Guild's Democracy Review in partnership with an external consultant including stakeholder interviews and workshops with trustees, officers, University staff and student liberation associations. JT noted that a draft new model of Guild democracy was currently being assessed by the Student Voice Team and would be presented to the Board at the May Trustee Board meeting.</p> <p>The Board noted the Democracy Review Update.</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
12	Democracy Operations & Elections Update	<p>SD presented Democracy Operations & Elections Update, for the Board's Information.</p> <p>SD updated the Board on the results of the most recent Member's Democratic Process, noting that several democratic committees had not met quoracy in the most recent round due to the absence of several Part-Time Officers at meetings. SD noted that Part-Time Officer engagement was a key issue for review as part of the current Democracy Review.</p> <p>SD noted that following the close of voting on the previous Friday (3rd March), the Guild had received 5,007 votes for a total of 31 candidates, compare to 6,003 votes in Officer Elections 2022. SD noted that the Guild's target of 8,000 votes had not been met, however similar trends falling turnout had been seen at many other University's in 2023. SD noted that the process had seen a significant drop-out rate of candidates from the opening of nominations to voting due to a new requirement for all candidates to submit a written manifesto and picture.</p> <p>AN noted their view that the elections had been very visible on campus and a strong return to pre-COVID levels of effort by candidates on the ground. The PGO noted their view that the level of engagement and excitement on campus during elections week had been lost since the pre-COVID period.</p> <p>The WCO noted the hard work of the Venues team to deliver incentives for voters. The President noted that the branding and social media presence of the elections had been more cohesive and better developed than previous years. The IO noted the visible presence of staff on campus. JT noted that significant staffing resource put into elections delivery in 2023.</p> <p>SD noted plans to track and analyse the impact of each incentive package on turnout over the week. JD noted the critical role of candidate numbers on physical presence on campus. JD suggested focusing on student engagement throughout the year in the run-up to</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>

		<p>elections week as an important factor in building awareness of the Guild and Officers. SD noted the importance of engagement pipelines across the organisation in bringing a wide range of candidates. KM noted the possibility of providing more information on the role of each Officer to give voters more information.</p> <p>YY asked about the decision not to hold an election over a weekend. JT noted that the Guild had previously run Officer elections over a weekend but had moved away from this format after negative feedback from candidates about tiredness and burnout.</p> <p>YY asked about promotion of the elections by senior University staff. The President noted email information from the University directing students to engage with elections, as well as information in college newsletters. JT noted more work to do to analyse what impact University communications had on elections engagement. The IO noted some confusion with prospective international student candidates about the need to take a sabbatical year and possible concerns with visas. MG suggested exploring candidate experience on understanding of the role. SD noted that from the Guild's 'myth busting' efforts, the most common query had been on visa implications. SD noted the possibility of addressing common misconceptions prior to the close of nominations.</p> <p>SD noted plans to bring a report on the Officer Elections 2023 to the next meeting of Engagement Committee.</p> <p>The Board noted the Democracy Operations & Elections Update.</p> <p>SD left the meeting at 20:05</p>	<p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p> <p>Noted</p>
13	AOB (Any Other Business)	No Items noted.	Noted
14	Meeting Reflection	No Items noted.	Noted

The Chair closed the meeting at 20:10.

Date of Next Meeting: **Monday 15th May 2023, 18:00 – 20:00 in the Mandela Room.**