

**Trustee Board Summary Minutes**

**Held on 24th November 2022 by Videoconferencing in Rooms H113A (C), BA-02-012 (B), MD008A (M) and Microsoft Teams**

**Present: In Attendance:**

Grace Boyle, President (Chair) David Longstaff, Chief Executive Officer

Rebecca Allen, Vice President, Education Colin Campbell, Director of HR & Campus Operations

Finola Quigg, Vice President Sports & Wellbeing Clodagh Kennedy, Director of Finance & Business

Ethan Davies, Vice President Coleraine Support

Chaudhary Hamza Riaz, Vice President Equality & Belonging Gavin Boyd, Membership & Comms Director

Robert Millar, Vice President Belfast Nigel Moore, GMcG Auditors

Ashley Neill, Lay Trustee Jackie Taggart, Note Taker

Aaron Ward, Lay Trustee

Darren Fowler, Lay Trustee

Andrea Probets Lay Trustee

Antoinette Bradley, Lay Trustee

Sophie Hilditch, Student Trustee

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| **Meeting Notes** | **Action** | **Update** |
| **Agenda Item 1:** Welcome by Chair:The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly the new External and Student Trustees and the DMC. She also welcomed NM from GMcG who attended to present the Auditor’s Report. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 2:** Apologies**:** DDH and EM. Elaine Hartin, Chief Strategy & Finance Officer and Lucia O’Connor, Director of Finance, both University staff, were not available to attend the Audit Presentation.DF requested that agenda items which involved voting be brought forward as he had to leave at 5.00 p.m. The Chair agreed that items 15 UUSU Bye-Law Review and 16 Trustee Welcome Handbook be heard immediately after Agenda Item 8 Chair’s Communications which were items for approval. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 3:** Accounts & Audit Presentation: NM summarised the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2022. He advised that the Auditors’ role was to review all statements and records and assist management in ensuring financial activities were carried out, and to check areas of accounting. He reported that there were no significant errors or matters to report in the financial statements’ bullet points. Charity Accounts have to be presented in a certain way which he explained, and also that Restricted Funds can only be used for a certain purpose whereas Unrestricted Funds are Free Reserves. Income is greater than Expenditure, and UUSU has a surplus this year despite the balance showing a deficit which relates to the Pension Scheme. There is nothing unusual in the Balance Sheet. Reserves have been built up over the past couple of years. He concluded that there were no significant issues or major management points or adjustments coming out of the audit which is accurate information.The Chair thanked NM who subsequently left the meeting.The Board commended the DFBS and her team on a successful audit. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 4:** Declaration of Interest: The Chair noted that there were no declarations. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 5:** Starred Items: There were no Starred Items and the DHRCO reminded that this Item related to Sub-Committee Minutes which were previously presented to the Board. As the Sub-Committees have been amalgamated with Board meetings, this item will be removed for future meetings. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 6:** Minutes/ Actions from Minutes of 8th September 2022: Agenda Item 11: Operating Plan Update: Reserves: The DFBS to benchmark other reserves limits in the sector and provide information on a possible reserves ceiling.This is ongoing.Agenda Item 14: Strategic Planning Process 2023+: The CEO to put a preliminary meeting into calendars.The Strategic Planning Group has been set up and this is ongoing. It will be addressed under Agenda Item 17: Strategy T&F Group.Minutes of 8th September 2022 were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 7:** Matters Arising:There were no Matters Arising. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 8:** Chair’s Communication:The Chair reported on campaigns that the Officers have worked on, including the Cost of Living Crisis where Officers have pushed key asks to tackle issues for our students, some of which have been released as a statement on our social media. Students are asking for cash concessions, and course and graduation costs reduced, some of which are aligned with NUS/USI. The negative effect of the crisis on students across Northern Ireland was discussed at UU Task & Finish Group and we are pushing to have emergency intervention. Through strong representation to the VC, some cash concessions have been noted officially at UU Senate and Winter Graduations will be free of charge which we hope to see extended for summer graduations. The food poverty issue has been addressed with free self-served continental breakfasts available over the next three Wednesdays and Campus Life are looking into the provision of free or discounted warm meals also for students. We are pushing for kitchenettes for students to enable them to heat their packed lunches and the VC has confirmed a further student kitchenette in Belfast. Sustainability and Green Week had wide activity on all campuses with Societies being involved. The Chair thanked the VPB for his work on this. We now have 750 Course Reps engaged in Student Voice structures. Bi-Weekly information for students giving updates is now provided, and PHD specific forms available so we can tackle the circumstances where PHD Researchers are both students and staff. The VPE and VPB, along with the Student Voice Team, are working on Equality and Diversity. The Diwali Festival brought a significant number of students to the Bar at Belfast. USI have held a Pink Training event for those who want to engage in liberation networks and LGBT activism. The Chair had been interviewed on Mark Carruthers’ programme on the BBC where she spoke on affordability and diversity of housing for students as we have a high influx of international students. We are in the midst of industrial action and have been working to ensure there is no detrimental effect on students. The Health & Sciences School was relocated from Jordanstown to Magee in July 2020, a move that students could not have foreseen when signing up for this course, and we pushed for those students who were financially disadvantaged to be recompensed. We have engaged with those students and provided papers on our findings. The University took a two- tier approach where students using a home address can apply for recompense of mileage, and we are working with the University on support for students who have been disadvantaged through child-care costs. 1,100 students qualified for travelling over 75 miles and support of £400 per semester. The Board commented on the good work that the Chair had done in representing students and the University on various media sports, and referencing what students are going to bring to Belfast. Also as regards graduation, it would be a shame if students missed out on graduating after several years of hard work due to costs. This is a massive win.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 15:** UUSU Byelaw Review**:** The Chair reported that the Review has been approved at Student Council and is for ratification only. She thanked the Student Voice team for their efforts. The Review was passed by Student Executive, then went to Student Council. The CEO added that the Board might be interested in the change to Numbers 7 and 8 which have now merged into Number 7 and supports the Board’s recommendations on Disciplinary Procedures. The Chair thanked the CEO for clarifying that point. The Board agreed that this gave flexibility.This was approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 16:** Trustee Welcome Handbook:The Board commented that this is a really positive piece of work, and it might be useful if organograms were added to help Trustees understand each department, and the Secretariat could also be included in the contacts information.The CEO explained that there is an organogram hyperlink on page 14 which includes current staff and Student Officers. There is a section at the end where the Secretariat could be added as a contact for administrative matters.The Board felt this was a positive step which is useful for new Trustees as it is a complex organisation and Board. It is a useful document which provides good inclusion for new people joining the Board. The new External Trustee added that she was delighted to receive the Handbook and enjoyed the tour around the Belfast Campus, commenting that her inductions were very good and much appreciated.The Handbook was approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 9:** Chief Executive’s Report:The CEO reported on the press coverage on the current strike action which takes place today, tomorrow and next Wednesday. He explained that Student Council who represents the membership and dictates how staff and students proceed, had mandated that UUSU doesn’t support strike action because of the impact the last couple of years has had on students. A Referendum can change this view, but without this the current policy lasts for two years from the date it was passed. Next semester might see more concentrated strike action and we will continue to lobby the University to ensure mitigations come to the fore and do some follow-up work on students’ views on strike action and the impacts which will continue after the strikes end. The DMC, GaB, was recruited two months ago. Rosie McKenna, Campaigns Coordinator, and Lauren Sloan, Graphic Designer will be coming on board next week to fully compliment the DMC directorate. We are still not seeing an adequate response for the HR role and are trying to ascertain if it is because it is based in Coleraine. The CEO and DHRCO will review the Job Description, and if there are financial implications, it will be brought to the Board. He gave an update on the Business Development role which was part of the Dormant Accounts Application. This fund is due to undergo some consultation on its accessibility and as such it is recommended that we pause our application and review as part of the strategy process to see how the Dormant Accounts Scheme could be used and revisit in 2023 with an evolved application in terms of strategy direction. Officers’ 360 Reviews are held annually at this time of year to help Officers understand their core strengths, but also any opportunities for development so they can develop themselves over the second stage of their terms. If the Board is approached by an Officer, it would be appreciated if you would help them to give full rounded results. Reserved Item.The Board thanked the CEO for his report and were content for the pause on the Dormant Accounts application. They were keen to continue to progress with the Business Development role in 2023 in any case as it was seen as such a pivotal role for the organisation. The Chair announced that she was pleased that the DMC role had been filled and asked if there were any other barriers in the HR role, or any recommendations for the Board? The CEO felt that it is important that we are strong across all campuses as the last three recruitments have been Belfast-based. The DHRCO commented that the grade had been discussed at Task & Finish Group and compared with similar roles in the sector at Grade 5 rate. The Job Description and Person Specification will be reviewed after Christmas.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 10:** Finance Update:The DFBS presented accounts for the first quarter to 31st October and explained the absence of a narrative. There was nothing unusual in the accounts. Income is on budget and the total expenditure is showing a surplus. Sport is very busy with larger expenditure as lots of buses are being used. Admin Salaries & Wages are less as a few vacancies in the first quarter are being filled now. Membership is over budget as there is money to be returned to the University in relation to Freshers events. Marketing costs included spend for Membership Guides and Wall Planners. The Balance Sheet shows Reserves of half a million which is a comfortable position to be in.The accounts were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 11:** Operating Plan Update:The CEO reported on two events which brought a lot of positivity, the first being the staff shift from Jordanstown to Belfast which has been a relative success thanks to the positive attitude of all the team, so actions can be closed off that were dependent on that. The second is the recruitment of the DMC who is now developing an engagement plan with students and has started to move comms areas forward.Updates in his paper were in red, with reflection on new priorities so some of the updates may be in development. Areas noted were that we felt that a Student Opportunities Service might develop our offer, but our Student Activities Manager has re-structured volunteering into a revamped area. We would like a bespoke benefits package exclusive to members of UUSU. Some benefit schemes that NUS/USI might run are not available in the local area. Ultimately the Business Development role might take this on and develop it, or it could be recycled into the next strategy plan priorities. We plan to examine the operation plan in more detail at the next meeting in January The Board advised that having students on campus can be under-estimated and resources are affected. It is worth re visiting in January. Transition was a tremendous effort, and the plan contains a lot of points with a good deal of them having been progressed, and areas around strategy can change. Trustees had requested sight over progression and discussions on the next strategic development but didn’t want to add to staff workload. The Board asked whether there is a way this can be supported and less information comes to the Board in such a way that it is not a labour to the CEO? The CEO offered that in the next strategy cycle from later 2023 we would likely see a compressed, living documented version of the Operations Plan with indications of sense, and trends which will be positive for the Board. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 12:** Organisational Risk Register:The CEO reported on the highest risks to the organisation on Central Risk Register. The pension deficit risk has been mitigated as quickly as possible with assurance in place that it will not become a problem.The transition to Belfast will drop off the Central Risk Register and everyone is doing a great job of flagging issues to senior managers and hopefully, staff positivity here will continue. The Board can read the Local Registers but there are no new risks to report at the current time.The Board asked if there is an opportunity to look at a more streamlined one-page document as to what is presented as a risk concern, i.e., what happened, and what is the current state? The Board can then comment on the issue to become more streamline. The CEO replied that this is something we want to tweak to make meetings more engaging.The Board continued that this would provide a better opportunity for input. The same risks are routine which the CEO updates, but something unforeseen could be picked up by the Board. It is confident and content with the CEO’s updates and handling of risk, but this could enhance and improve the Board’s input on this.DF left the meeting. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13:** Health & Safety Update: The CEO reported that following on from Audit, Risk & Compliance Committee meetings, twice a year there was an SMT meeting to deal with Health and Safety policies and risks at work to mitigate anything we have identified or any work that must be done. It is an information document which gives the Board the opportunity to raise anything that emanates from it.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 14:** Mental Health Action Plan: The Chair asked that this item is deferred, explaining that we had a Mental Health Campaign last year where we received money from the Government, and we are continuing objectives and goals. We have been working through Mental Health planning with the Marketing Team and will present at the next Board meeting.This was agreed. |  | Mental Health Action Plan deferred to the next meeting. |
| **Agenda Item 17:** Strategy Task & Finish Group:The CEO updated that the group has been established and there have been two meetings so far. The first meeting dealt with what strategy is. Previously it was owned by management and imposed on staff and now most organisations are talking about progressive and changeable strategies to adapt to circumstances. At the end of the first session, we wanted to achieve change and adopt clear cornerstones. Our Aims and Objectives are already in place and are well translated by our membership. Once we have had that consultation piece, the framework will be defined, and the outcomes will be interchangeable and relevant as to how students will need us over a three year period and not pre-empted as to what these needs might be. There will be an annual operating/business plan under the framework but this will be internal. The second session considered how this will all fall into place, i.e., who do we need to engage with for mechanisms and routes to merge and form any new strategy? We might require longer consideration with more check points with stakeholders and groups who feed in and finish in August, carried out from a client perspective. The Board will sign off in August 2023. Strategy is adaptive and the following six months would verify the correct direction of travel is in place with the opportunity to use audiences from the consultation stage to sense check. Next time we might look 15 months ahead and start to think about how we are gathering data on the next strategy just after the half way mark of the current one. Our Staff meeting on 9th Dec will carry out workshops with staff to help develop the framework. In January and February, we will gather concentrated feedback from the student community. At the Task & Strategy meeting in January, we can ascertain which Students’ Unions are most like us and how they are using strategy to develop their offering. In March, all consultations, and data we have gathered will be put together to see what a framework will look like. This has been a thought-provoking and interesting process.The Chair agreed that it was an interesting time to be involved in the strategy. Student expectations have changed, and we have to be more agile and flexible in our approach.The Board agreed that consultation will take place from January to March. In March the Task & Finish Group will look at insight.The CEO added that Task & Finish Group will meet in June and present a direction. In July the Group will present where we are at to Trustees and seek authority to push forward with pathway. The Board suggested that how we consult and the platforms we use are important. If we consult in closed workshops, this is not going to change because we are not consulting with non-engagers. Open forums in main halls on campuses was suggested. The CEO advised that this had already been discussed.The Board suggested being welcoming, engaging and visible, especially on the Belfast Campus, and give reassurance that we don’t just want to talk to engaged students. There was an acceptance though that there may not be adequate resources and techniques to do this as well as we would like to. Examining new income streams to budget for improvements in technology to gather feedback and information was suggested. The Board was pleased to have Officers’ input. The CEO offered that engagement from those external to the organisation is going to be collected through various points of consultation, and if this should be structured where we reach out to students for content. It was agreed that they are engaged, but outside Task & Finish Group might not be the best use of their time.The VPE thanked everyone in the Task & Finish Group for their work and added that, as Officers, we don’t see those sort of things often. The VPB said that a lot of feedback has been captured. It is useful to hear the Board’s thoughts also, and there is direct action in having them involved.  |  | The Board to receive update on engagement and gathering data at the March Meeting. |
| **Agenda Item 18:** UUSU Staff Meeting/Christmas Meal**:** The CEO reminded of comms that were circulated to the Board noting that they are welcome to join the meeting, even for a portion of the afternoon, or just the Christmas Meal. We would love to have you there. We appreciate there are other things going on. It is an open invitation. The meeting is on the Belfast Campus from 10.30 a.m. until 3.45 p.m. and the meal is in the Ramada at 4.00 p.m. The Board asked if there was anything that it could cover for the staff meeting.The CEO answered that staff could meet Board members and the meal might be the best conduit if one Trustee sits at each table to give staff the opportunity for engagement. The agenda will be circulated shortly. The afternoon is going to be dedicated to a strategy workshop 2.00 – 3.30 p.m. and Trustees might find that it is most useful to join us for the afternoon and the meal. | The Board to advise the Sec if they will attend and if applicable give their choice of menu. |  |
| **Agenda Item 19:** Any Other BusinessThe VPC queried if there was training available on how to extract information from large quantity documents, e.g., revalidation, which have papers of 100-150 pages. The CEO offered that he was looking for ways to develop on-boarding for Officers using the induction manual as a framework. The Board agreed that Officers joining it each year could have some basic training which would be valuable and incorporating some more visuals to demonstrate trends and progress would be useful with the possibility of extra operational training also being helpful. The DMC agreed that we can work to make documents more accessible with more visuals. Nicra or Board Room Apprentice might help. The Board spoke of a willingness from External Trustees to assist Student Officers should a need arise. The Board also suggested that at the next Board Meeting, the DMC should give a summary on his first 100 days in the organisation including his initial thoughts, with findings as to what the Board can do to support him moving forward. | The DMC to check NICRA or Board Room Apprentice.The DMC and Chair to meet regarding training for 2023/24. | The DMC to provide overview of first 100 days at the next meeting. |
| **Agenda Item 20:** Date of Next Meeting:26th January 2023 |  |  |