



## **Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board**

Date 1 December 2025

Time: 13.00pm– 16.15pm

Location: The Greenhouse, Devonshire House, Streatham Campus, Exeter

Membership:

Sebastian Racisz – President, Officer Trustee and Chair of the Board

Katy Willis – External Trustee and Deputy Chair of the Board

Kira Brookes (KB) – Officer Trustee and Vice Chair of the Board

Margaret Laithwaite (ML) – External Trustee

Sophie Elliott – External Trustee

Harriet Jones (HJ) – External Trustee

Rose Arhin – Officer Trustee

Francis Steptoe – Officer Trustee

Gemma Veal – Officer Trustee

Edward O’Sullivan – Student Trustee

Mia Alexander – Student Trustee

Dhruv Chadda – Student Trustee

Marco Agolzer – Student Trustee

Cordelia Thompson – Student Trustee

Apologies:

Margaret Laithwaite (ML) – External Trustee

In Attendance:

Ali Chambers (AC) – CEO and Board Secretary

Tom Barrass (TB) – Head of Student Engagement

Cassie Fewings (CF) – Head of Marketing and Brand

Lizzie Bowtell (LB) – Head of Organisational Development

Amy Holden (AH) – Insights and Influence Senior Manager

Dani Alexander (DA) – Leadership and Governance Manager, Board Clerk / Minute taker

Cindy Porter (CP) – Head of Finance

Observers for Effectiveness Review:

Amara Relf – Union Affairs & Communications Officer (and Board Chair) at Leeds University Union

Matt Broadey – Governance Manager at Leeds University Union

## STANDING ITEMS

1. Chair's Welcome  
The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all Trustees.
2. Apologies for absence  
Apologies were received from Margaret Laithwaite
3. Notification of Any Other Business  
SR raised an AOB on the AGM to brief trustees.
4. Notification of Any New Conflicts of Interest  
There were no notification of any new conflicts of interest.
5. Notification of Any Conflicts for this meeting  
There was no notification of any new conflicts of interest for this meeting.
6. Minutes from the last meeting and action log To Approve  
The Board approved the minutes from the last meeting and action log.

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## BUSINESS ITEMS

7. Approval of the Financial Accounts Year end 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 by External Auditor  
CP gave a clear summary of the statutory accounts. This included the audit process, the adjustments that were made, and the current level of reserves. CP also guided the board through the approval process and answered questions about financial management and the audit findings.

After the management accounts were closed, several audit adjustments were added. These included accruals related to the previous financial year but were confirmed after the audit period. Smaller adjustments included the audit fee and a timing adjustment for a credit card transaction.

CP explained that the organisation currently has reserves of one point six million pounds, all of which are unrestricted. After accounting for the value of assets and a previously agreed allocation, the free reserve balance is one point five million pounds. This is above the organisation's reserves policy, which requires three months of operating costs. This shows that the organisation is in a strong financial position.

CP confirmed that the Finance and Risk committee had reviewed the accounts and recommended that the Board approve them. There were no major questions

from the board. APPROVED: The accounts and the management letter were approved for submission.

8. Student Engagement Report

To Note

SR presented the Student Engagement Report, sharing recent officer activities and campaigns. SR encouraged discussion about project goals, engagement approaches, and the challenges of running many different initiatives with a small officer team.

SR summarised current officer campaigns, including work on employability, safety for vulnerable students, cost of living support, housing, and curriculum for change. Examples included the partnership with the Ninety Three Percent Club, national campaigns focused on improving processes, and efforts to ensure students are fully involved in university consultations.

The Board discussed how important it is to clearly set out project goals and actions in the Student Engagement Report. Suggestions included making objectives easier to understand and better reflecting the wide range of student led activity, not just officer updates. SR agreed to look at how project outcomes and engagement can be communicated more effectively to trustees.

**ACTION: SR/ Officer team to improve how project goals, actions, and outcomes are communicated in the Student Engagement Report, ensuring objectives are clear and that the full range of student led activity is represented for trustees.**

There were concerns about how to sustain so many projects with only two full time officers. SR and others noted the need for stronger coordination, better ways to capture student ideas, and a focus on keeping engagement and representation strong in the new student representation model.

SR explained the work underway to improve how academic representation and impact are recorded. This includes building systems that consistently track activities across departments and student representatives. These improvements will support better communication within the organisation and clearer reporting externally.

Trustees and students reported widespread confusion and anxiety among Politics students and staff about module closures, changes to accreditation, and the lack of clear communication from the department, with some students fearing further reductions in module offerings. The Board acknowledged the need for the Guild to play a more active role in communicating curriculum changes, ensuring students are informed, and advocating for transparent

processes, especially as the Politics department had not matched the transparency seen in other departments.

The group agreed on the importance of targeted communications, engaging students in affected departments, and learning from best practices in other areas, such as the Physics department's transparent curriculum rollout. Plans were made to address these issues in future engagement reports and to involve senior university leadership where necessary.

**ACTION: Francis to highlight student feedback to the University, and help create improved communications for students, especially Politics students about curriculum changes. Communications should clearly explain the Guild's role and the support available.**

#### 9. CEO Report

To Note

AC shared key points from the CEO report. The Higher Education sector was facing financial pressures and was expected to deliver more with fewer resources. A major theme highlighted in the report was transnational education (TNE), which related to students studying with the university from abroad institutions.

TNE remained a key focus. The Guild had been considering its plans for international students and intended to include this in the Articles review to define who their members were. AC had already spoken with Southampton University and planned to speak with other Russell Group universities to understand best practice. The board discussed concerns about the strategic impact of supporting thousands of additional students through TNE arrangements. AC confirmed that the Guild was reviewing its membership scope and service provision in line with legal and contractual obligations.

The board discussed how principles of decolonising the curriculum were being applied to international education. It was considered important that these principles were applied for TNE students.

AC highlighted that the approved funding for strategy work had supported Counter Culture consultancy, who were working on three major transformation projects to improve how the Guild operated and supported students, especially those in societies. Extra resources had been allocated to the Insights and Marketing teams. This helped amplify student voices and ensured that student representatives were heard in enhanced activities. Counter Culture had also planned to start scoping "Credit Where it's Due," a skills framework that could allow extra-curricular activity to count as credit for student leaders.

CP updated the board on ongoing consultations with solicitors and the university regarding the VAT status and legal autonomy of societies. CP noted that inconsistencies exist across the sector and that the Guild's unique structure requires tailored advice, with NUS having similar conversations about the same issue across the sector.

**ACTION: AC to ask the University how principles of decolonising the curriculum are being applied in international education and report back to the Board.**

#### 10. Organisational performance

To Approve

CP presented the October management accounts, highlighting a surplus position, changes in income and expenditure, and the introduction of financial KPIs, and addressed questions about society balances and value for money for members. Questions were raised from Trustees about societies with high balances and the implications for VAT registration. CP clarified that the VAT threshold is based on a rolling 12-month period and that societies' spending patterns fluctuate, with guidance provided to ensure value for money without imposing spending requirements.

LB delivered the people and culture dashboard from 1<sup>st</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025, with a workforce health update, covering turnover, sickness, recruitment, and diversity data, and invited trustees to suggest improvements for future people reporting. Efforts are ongoing to improve the quality and detail of diversity and demographic data, with plans for a targeted declaration campaign and requests for trustee input on desired dashboard metrics.

AH summarised progress on new impact measurement tools and student engagement initiatives, noting improvements in reaching underrepresented groups and outlining plans to further enhance engagement and representation.

The Board noted the update.

#### 11. BREAK 14.40pm – 14.45pm

#### 12. Organisational Design

LB provided an update on the organisational design (OD) work, including the review of SLT structure, transformation projects, and the future role of student staff, and facilitated group discussions to gather input on student staff involvement and development.

LB recapped the OD journey, noting that after initial proposed SLT structure changes, the focus shifted to three major transformation projects. The board

requested more detailed proposals covering the entire organisation, including investment and role allocation.

LB introduced a set of questions for group discussion, seeking input on the types of work student staff should undertake, the balance between operational and developmental roles, and how to design a flexible, impactful student staff model. Groups were asked to provide written feedback for further consideration.

Trustees raised concerns about potential SLT expansion given budget constraints. AC clarified that while increasing SLT capacity remains an option, any changes would be considered alongside broader organisational design to ensure the right balance at all levels.

The Board noted the update.

13. Student Representation Review update To Note  
TB led a discussion on proposed changes to officer roles, byelaw amendments, and the structure of the Trustee Board. Participants debated the benefits of appointing versus electing student trustees and agreed on a more transparent appointment process.

The Board discussed the naming and ordering of new officer roles, taking into account feedback from students and the Marketing team. It was agreed that the focus should be on clarity and student understanding rather than semantics. APPROVED: The byelaw amendment reflecting the new structure was approved.

Participants discussed whether new student trustees should be appointed or elected. They considered factors such as inclusivity, legitimacy, and transparency. The consensus was to appoint student trustees, with suggestions to make the process stronger by involving the Guild Accountability Board and increasing openness.

The board agreed that the student trustee appointment process should be made more transparent, potentially including reports and scoring summaries for ratification. Communication about the new structure should be made clear to students.

TB thanked the Board, noting that it had been a huge journey to reach this point. The Board congratulated Tom and the team on their work in getting to this stage.

**ACTION:** Dani to review and enhance the transparency and inclusivity of the student trustee appointment process. This includes considering

involvement of Guild Accountability Board members in the panel and providing more detailed reporting to the board.

EOS left the meeting at 15.27pm.

#### 14. Sexual Misconduct Survey Findings

To Note

AC presented the findings of the sexual misconduct study, noting that Exeter's rates of unwanted sexual behaviour are above the sector average, and summarised ongoing and planned actions to address the issue.

The study revealed that instances of unwanted sexual behaviour at Exeter are higher than the sector average, prompting concern and the need for continued monitoring and action.

AC and KB outlined current initiatives and future plans to address sexual misconduct, including officer-led actions and requests for further university involvement, while noting that the survey will not be repeated in the near future. Trustees noted other countries approach to this could be a good example for the University to follow.

**ACTION:** Provide an update on activities in response to the sexual misconduct survey findings, including tangible measures to track progress (Ali and Kira).

#### 15. Any other business

SR briefed the Board on the Annual General Meeting taking place later that day. The Board noted the update.

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### ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

- 16. Finance and Risk Committee minutes - Noted
- 17. People and Governance Committee minutes - Noted
- 18. Budget and reforecast timeline - Noted
- 19. Guild Accountability Board meeting minutes - Noted

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20. Date of the next meeting 12<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

21. The Chair closed the meeting and thanked trustees for their time.

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### ACTION LOG

Action	Date of action	Deadline	Responsible for action	Progress and Impact
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TB to provide an update on the adoption and communication of the Islamophobia definition at the next Board meeting.	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025—bring paper to TB	Tom Barrass	Update brought to P&G committee on 13 <sup>th</sup> November
ML to determine next steps in process of moral obligation payment from the Board to the student.	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	Asap	Margaret Laithwaite	Complete
Update absent Trustees on the dashboard and KPI development.	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	Cassie Thornton and Amy Holden	On agenda for 1 <sup>st</sup> Dec board under Org performance
SLT to action strategy ambition and Organisational design proposal, and bring an update back to the December board.	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	SLT	On agenda for 1 <sup>st</sup> Dec board
DA to implement plans for the AGM, including live streaming for online students, clarifying voting procedures, and improving the clarity of meeting materials for students unfamiliar with the Guild and the AGM process.	16 <sup>th</sup> October 2025	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	Dani Alexander	Online option made available at AGM
SR/ Officer team to improve how project goals, actions, and outcomes are communicated in the Student Engagement Report, ensuring objectives are clear and that the full range of student led activity is represented for trustees.	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	12 <sup>th</sup> March 2025 Trustee Board meeting	Seb Racisz/ Officer Team	
Francis to highlight student feedback to the University, and help create improved communications for students, especially Politics students about curriculum changes. Communications should clearly explain the Guild's role and the support available.	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	January 2026	Francis Steptoe	



AC to ask the University how principles of decolonising the curriculum are being applied in international education and report back to the Board.	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	January 2026	Ali Chambers	
Dani to review and enhance the transparency and inclusivity of the student trustee appointment process. This includes considering involvement of Guild Accountability Board members in the panel and providing more detailed reporting to the board.	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	In line with the student trustee recruitment timeline	Dani Alexander	
Provide an update on activities in response to the sexual misconduct survey findings, including tangible measures to track progress (Ali and Kira).	1 <sup>st</sup> December 2025	12 <sup>th</sup> March 2025	Ali Chambers and Kira Brookes	

