

Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board

Date: 17 October 2024

Time: 9.30am – 12.30pm

Location: Devonshire House, University of Exeter

Membership:

Alex Martin (AM) – President and Chair of the Board
Katy Willis (KW) – External Trustee and Deputy Chair of the Board
Harriet Jones (HJ) – External Trustee and Vice Chair of the Board
Ella Trudgeon (ET) – Student Trustee
Margaret Laithwaite (ML) – External Trustee
Reuben Sek (RS) – Student Trustee
Charles Jones (CJ) – External Trustee
Kira Brookes (KB) – Officer Trustee/ Student Living Officer
India Walton-Salmon (IWS) – Officer Trustee / Societies and Employability Officer
Thomas Tran (TT) – Officer Trustee/ Communities and Equality Officer
Sebastian Racisz (SR) – Officer Trustee / Education Officer
Edward O'Sullivan (EOS) – Student Trustee
Fanar Al-Derzi (FAD) – Student Trustee
Sophie Elliott (SE) – External Trustee

Apologies:

Eleanor Walker (EW) – Head of Organisational Development

Absent:

Agneta Ravindran Buvana (ARB) – Student Trustee

In Attendance:

Ali Chambers (AC) – CEO and Board Secretary
Tom Barrass (TB) – Head of Student Engagement
Cassie Thornton (CT) – Head of Marketing and Brand
Tony Reissner (TR) – Interim Head of Finance (online)
Dani Alexander (DA) – Leadership and Governance Manager, Board Clerk / Minute taker
Amy Holden (AH) – Insights and Influence Senior Manager

MEETING MINUTES

1. Welcome to Trustees

The Chair welcomed incoming Trustees. The Chair thanked Trustees for attending the Board away day on the 16th October. The Chair summarised their key takeaways from the away day.

2. Apologies for absence
Apologies received from Eleanor Walker.
3. Notification of Any Other Business
Thomas Tran brought an action to the Board from the Finance and Risk committee action log – 'Seek expert guidance on how to measure the carbon impact of decisions for inclusion in cover sheets'
4. Notification of Any new Conflicts of Interest
No new conflicts of interest.
5. Notification of Any Conflicts for this meeting
No new conflicts of interest for the meeting.
6. Board Terms of Reference and Delegation of Authority
No comments or amendments were highlighted.
7. Minutes from the last meeting and action log
The Chair highlighted that these minutes had been approved by the Trustee board offline to be made available for students on the Guild website.

The Chair went through the action log and updated the Board on the progress of these actions. TB updated the Board on the Sustainability item where an update will be brought to the March Trustee Board meeting in 2025.

The Chair asked the Board for any comments or Questions. There were no comments or questions from Trustees.

8. Student Engagement Report
The Chair (AM) introduced the paper as read, and updated the Board on the new format of the Student Engagement Report (previously the Student Experience Report). This was to ensure all student engagement alongside Officers was captured, and to ensure there was an opportunity for discussion or questions on the report.

The Chair asked the Board for any comments or Questions.

Trustees highlighted that the report was an improvement, and provided a lot of information for the Board. Trustees asked Officers for an update on Welcome Week, and Officers updated Trustees on the positive running of the week, and

would ensure feedback was sought from students. Officers highlighted areas for improvement around accessibility for events.

Trustees highlighted the need for more information to be gathered during Welcome Week on students finding friends, and how Welcome week has contributed to students building relationships with others. Trustees asked whether data was being gathered from all Students, not just first years.

CT updated the Board on how data will be gathered via the Survey Superheroes in October, with specific focus on whether students have found Welcome an opportunity to meet people and make friends. CT confirmed the Survey Superheroes reaches students from all different courses and levels.

Trustees asked the Guild team whether Societies received support during the longer Welcome Period. TB updated Trustees on Welcome week and the updated format of a longer Welcome week rather than 1 fair. The new format was updated due to feedback from student communities and groups including accessibility concerns. Feedback from the new Welcome Week format was received well by students. KB highlighted that more feedback was being sought via the Survey Superheroes.

Trustees asked for more information on Survey Superheroes, and how these were selected, and whether these students were already engaged with the Guild. AC updated the board on the work being done with Survey Superheroes, include the need to increase the accessibility of giving feedback and also the inclusivity of the representation and the feedback by paying students. AC highlighted the need to strengthen our methodology for measuring impact, and how this would be factored in to the new Guild Strategy. AC also highlighted the work being done to corroborate the survey superhero data with the Big Guild survey, which goes out once a year to all students, which usually comes back with a 2-3% percentage point variance.

Trustees asked for clarification on the insights sought during Welcome week, and asked whether there was a KPI for student engagement during welcome week. Trustees noted the current level of engagement was 27%. CT updated Trustees around how this was the first time the Guild had gathered data on how many students engaged with the Guild in Welcome Week, and would continue to work on capturing engagement points during Welcome weeks including academic inductions, and other face to face interactions on stalls. Trustees felt there could be more opportunities for the Guild to increase the 27% engagement via other students groups such as Degree Apprenticeships. AC highlighted to the Board that the goal would be to reach 100% of new starters as an aspiration.

Trustees asked how the Guild teams were engaging with University activities and AU activities during Welcome week. TB highlighted the Guild's work being done to work on student engagement with the University and AU through their Insight teams, including sharing data and matching data against our data to see where there overlaps in terms of student engagement or where we are providing different services or opportunities.

Trustees thanked the Guild Accountability Board members, and Students for attending the Trustee Board away day. Trustees asked for more clarification on Officer Priorities, and how the Guild Accountability Board fed back to the Officer Priorities. The Chair (AM) updated Trustees on the feedback sought from the Accountability Board.

ACTION: Trustee deep dive in to Guild Impact and data

The Board noted the paper.

9. CEO Report

AC presented the paper as read. AC thanked Trustees for their valuable input at the Trustee Board away day.

AC updated the Board the work being done, and relationship with Cornwall SU Services including their appointment of a new CEO at The SU in Cornwall.

AC highlighted the need to strengthen partnerships when planning Welcome Week next year, and the need to ensure there is a relationship with the AU who help to deliver the Sport and Wellness Strategy which sits within the Sport Department. AC highlighted the huge contribution that the Guild and the AU deliver in terms of Wellness and preventative measures and supporting loneliness. AC also highlighted the Arts and Culture team partnership, with Cassie Thornton taking forward this work to pitch to lead the approach to welcome 2025 with belonging and Wellness being the key drivers of all of the engagement across the campus.

AC informed Board of the relationships being developed with the new Government, with Officers hosting a kick off meeting with local MP Steve Race to start developing that relationship, and highlighting key student issues and concerns such as housing and community cohesion, and also maintenance loans, cost of living, and International student work limitations.

ACTION: Steve Race update for Trustees

AC highlighted the priority areas for the Guild collective leadership group this year including the development of our new Guild Strategy, reinforced and rigorous measures for measuring our impact, and the representation review as well.

Trustees asked for an update on the Working Groups that were formed following the Encampment and University meetings. AM updated the Board on the details and progress of these meetings.

Trustees noted the paper.

10. Organisational performance -Management Accounts and People and Culture priorities

TR presented the Management Accounts for August (final), and a September preview via a presentation. Highlighted included:

- As at the 31st August 2024, the Guild was showing a surplus of £61.7k and a positive year to date variance of £49.6k compared to budget.
- The year-to-date variances relate mainly to delayed expenditure in Payroll and Overheads
- TR went through the Management Accounts by department including narrative on variances.
- TR highlighted the expenditure as a percentage of income.
- TR shared a September management accounts preview which would go to Finance and Risk Committee.
- TR shared the 10 largest and 10 negative Society balances.

TR asked Trustees for comments or questions. Trustees thanked Tony and the Finance team for providing additional narrative for underspend/overspends. Trustees highlighted their concern around salary underspends, and asked whether salary or real underspend could be reallocated to key Guild priorities. AC highlighted the need to use the real underspend for key Guild priorities.

ACTION: Real salary underspend to be discussed at Finance and Risk committee re reallocating to key Guild priorities

Trustees asked how surpluses are used in year. AC confirmed that surpluses would be reallocated during the Reforecast process in February/March.

Trustees asked for more information on the Guild block grant/budget, and whether this would be under pressure in the future given challenges in the sector. AC provided an update on the budget from the last couple of years including challenges faced such as recruitment delays which generated surpluses. AC also highlighted the Guild had absorbed increasing costs and inflation, and also significant increases in pay and non-pay inflation, which were

not factored originally to the 5 year plan. AC also highlighted the need to show our Impact and how we are a key partner to the University, including our insights gathering and giving the University the information it needs.

AC presented the People and Culture snapshot, highlighting the below points:

- The paper summarises key People and Culture priorities, including key documents the board has historically approved, including the People and Culture strategy and annual plans.
- Key People data would be presented to the People and Governance Committee for increased scrutiny
- The Guild has significant employee voice mechanisms, and these are being looked at to improve the effectiveness of those and working with our employee Representative Forum to make sure that they connect leadership and our full cohort of staff into decision making
- AC informed Trustees of the exciting news that the Guild ranked in the top 100 UK Best Small Companies to work for

Trustees were asked for comments or questions.

Trustees asked for more information on Student staff including pressures in their jobs at the Guild. AC updated the Board around the work being done to better understand Student Staff (who's satisfaction score is extremely high), to understand better how student staff employment contributes to their employability thereafter, and how mutually beneficial the relationship is with Student staff.

Trustees asked for People and Culture reports to be broken down more by demographic. **ACTION: People and Culture team to look into whether reports can be broken down by demographic.**

Trustees approved the Management Accounts and People and Culture priorities.

11. New Strategic Plan actions, timeline and scope resulting from the Away Day
AH joined the meeting at 10.45.

AC presented the key takeaways from the Trustee Board away day on the 16th October. AC proposed the direction of the Strategy planning, and talked through each stage and what each stage would involve. The stages involved would be evaluation, then environmental analysis, getting the direction right, options and choice, planning, and then implementation.

AC asked Trustees to discuss in their tables what they wanted to see in Trustee board meetings from October up until July, and what else do Trustees want to see in the process. Trustees discussed on their tables the questions posed to them, and fed these back to AC.

12. The meeting had a break from 10.56am-11.06am

13. Student Representation Review update

The Chair introduced the Student Representation review, and highlighted the importance of this project, being a big strategic project the Guild was working on. The Chair highlighted the need for a Deep Dive on this subject.

AC provided context on the Student Representation review for Trustees which began in 2021, and has since been developed with Trustees and Officer teams since 2021. AC highlighted to Trustees that this topic was contentious and noted there could be a range of views on this review.

TB gave an update and context on the Student Representation review from the work done over the last couple of years including why this project was being done, what the goal was, work done so far, findings so far, takeaways and next steps. TR highlighted that this meeting was to provide an update to Trustees on the work done so far, how students have been involved throughout the project, and an update on next steps.

TR highlighted the below:

- There was a recognition by trustee of the limitations of the current officer-led model of representation being able to represent a growing and increasingly diverse student body of over 30,000 students
- The goal was to undertake a fundamental and radical review of the current officer-led model of student representation withing the Guild to ensure representation was fit for the future
- Work done so far included a survey sent to the student community, insights gathered from 30 student organisations across 7 countries, and a student hackathon
- Findings included 88% of students saying it was important to feel represented at University
- Key takeaways included prioritising localised representation, being truly student led, and developing new opportunities
- Next steps with the review would involve developing a business case outlining a proposal, consulting student groups and communities to co-create alternate representation mechanisms for their remits, consulting key university stakeholders, and presenting the business case to the Guild Accountability Board
- Presentation to the Trustee Board would be brought to the meeting on 5 December for final consideration and approval of the business case and implementation plan

Trustees were asked to consider the following questions in groups:

- Do trustees support the next steps outlined or are there any further risks or opportunities that you would like the Guild to consider as part of this work?
- What additional information would trustees like to see included in the business case regarding a future representation model?

Key points to feedback from the discussions included

- Positive reflections included localised representation
- Challenges included the loss of full-time graduate roles
- Effective feedback on pilots would be needed throughout the schemes
- Staff support necessities with new model would be need to be scoped
- Trustees asked to more information on the pilot schemes taking place
- Challenges if Officer roles were reduced would involve ensuring the Officer(s) are not overworked
- Risk around communication, ensuring a flow of communication between representation mechanisms are formed
- Risk around communication and showing impact to the University through a more diluted representation model
- Positive opportunities around increase in diverse representation
- Positive that the review was driven by students
- Support in being radical when thinking about representation
- Risks in replicating current diversity challenges and bringing these risk to a local level
- Question whether local representation model has capacity to take this on
- Feedback to consider would be whether the model should be pushed back to 2026-2027
- Additional information – wider student consultation could be considered, deep dive necessary on this subject for Trustees, and legal advice on international student involvement could be sought

Next steps would be to invite Trustees to a deep dive session to discuss timeline and allocate resources, and to ensure a regular flow of Student Representation review meetings to take place before now and December.

ACTION: Student Representation Review deep dive session to take place before 5th December Trustee Board

14. Community cohesion

TT introduced the paper to the Board. The paper provided an update on the Guild's work in relation to freedom of speech and community cohesion.

Trustees highlighted the need for policy systemic changes to bring about meaningful change. Trustees asked for information on how information, processes and policy sharing was being made clear to students, and not just relying on training as the sole focus.

AC asked the Board whether they were happy for the People and Governance committee to be responsible to receiving updates on Community Cohesion going forward. Trustees agreed with this approach.

Action: Community cohesion to sit under the People and Governance Committee

Trustees asked for more information on free speech and academic freedoms and free speech legislation, and whether there had been situations with students and what the main risks were in this area. TB updated the Board on the current student activities, and the support and work being done in the area of Free Speech.

Trustees discussed protected characteristics, and if the Guild has considered class and how it comes in to Community Cohesion. Trustees noted the Equality Act originally included Class as a protected characteristic, but it was taken out. Trustees felt to be radically inclusive we could include Class as a protected characteristic within the Guild.

Action: Ensure that our approach to diversity monitoring within our new HR system includes characteristics related to socio-economic background, so that this can be reported to P&G Committee

15. Student Members' Meeting engagement plan

DA presented the paper as read, and provided an update on the plans for the Student Members' meeting including holding the meeting during the Welcome Back week in January to increase engagement.

Trustees were asked for comments or feedback. Trustees highlighted the possible clash the date being in January could cause being during an assessment period. Trustees noted the NUS affiliation, and how this would need to be managed and made clear as to what Students would be approving at the meeting.

Trustees were asked to approve the date and plan of the members meeting. Trustees voted to approve the date and plan, and this was approved.

16. Complaints Annual Report

TB presented the Annual Complaints report detailing all complaints received during the 2023-2024 academic year in accordance with the Guild's Complaints Procedure.

Trustees recommended a summary table to be included in future Complaints Annual reports, and also a rolling action plan. Trustees felt the report was a good way to be transparent with students.

ACTION: Develop complaints summary snapshot and look at demographics

Trustees approved the report.

17. Board Schedule of Business

The Chair presented the paper as read, and asked for comments or feedback on this paper.

Trustees asked for more information on how the Guild is building sustainability in to the schedule of business and general running of the Guild. Trustees asked for deep dives to be added to the Schedule of Business.

Action: Add deep dives to the Schedule of Business

Action: Community Cohesion to be added to the People and Governance committee remit

Action: Finance and Risk committee meeting in February date to be moved

Trustees approved the Schedule of Business.

18. CEO Performance Management Conversation summary

AC, CT, TB and DA left the meeting.

The Chair presented the paper to the Board. Trustees discussed the paper.

AC, CT, TB and DA returned to this meeting.

19. Items for Information

Trustees noted and approved the following items:

FAC minutes – To Note

CGR minutes – To Note

Committee Membership – To approve

Companies House and Charity Commission notice – To Note

Register of Interests – To Note

20. Any Other Business

Thomas Tran brought an action to the Board from the Finance and Risk committee action log – 'Seek expert guidance on how to measure the carbon impact of decisions for inclusion in cover sheets'.

Trustees asked for more information on how the Guild is building sustainability in to the schedule of business and general running of the Guild. TB updated the board on the current work being done, and informed the board they would bring

an update to the People and Governance committee. **ACTION: Sustainability Update to go to the People and Governance Committee**

21. Feedback Form

Trustees were asked to complete the Board feedback form after the meeting.

22. Date of the Next Meeting – 17 October 2024

23. End of meeting

ACTION LOG

Action	Date of action	Deadline	Responsible for action
Create top level principles around EDI for the new building within the Estates Strategy	12/04/23	2023-2024 On hold due to delay to new building	People and Culture, and Operation Team
Present a model of representation to be approved by Board in December 2024.	01/07/2024	December 2024	TB
Real salary underspend to be discussed at Finance and Risk committee re reallocating to key Guild priorities	17/10/24	November FAC	ML
People and Culture team to look into whether reports can be broken down by demographic	17/10/24	November People and Culture	EW
Student Representation Review deep dive session to take place before 5th December Trustee Board	17/10/24	November 2024	TB
Community cohesion to sit under the People and Governance Committee	17/10/24	November 2024	DA
Ensure that our approach to diversity monitoring within our new HR system includes characteristics related to socio-economic background, so that this can be reported to P&G Committee - moved to PGR action log	17/10/24	Bring back to a future People and Governance Committee	People and Culture Team
Add deep dives to the Schedule of Business	17/10/24	November 2024	DA
Finance and Risk committee meeting in February date to be moved	17/10/24	November 2024	DA

Trustee deep dive in to Guild Impact and data	17/10/24	November 2024	DA
Develop complaints summary snapshot and look at demographics	17/10/24	March Board 2025	TB
Steve Race update for Trustees	17/10/24	November 2024	CT
Sustainability Update to go to the People and Governance Committee	17/10/24	November 2024	TB

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