

Board of Trustees Minutes

City, University of London Students' Union is a registered charity (charity number 1173858) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 10834450).

4.30pm | 28 February 2023 | AG04, College Building, 280 St John Street, EC1V 0HB

Members	Initials	Meeting 1 13.09.22	Meeting 2 06.12.22	Meeting 3 28.02.23	Meeting 4 23.05.23	Meeting 5 17.07.23
Gesmina Tsourrai (President) (Chair)	GT	✓	✓	✓		
Aaminah Patel (Deputy President)	AP	✓	A	N/M		
Yavuz Emin Kafadar (Deputy President)	YK	✓	✓	A		
Fortune Sampson (Deputy President)	FS	✓	✓	A		
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓	✓	✓		
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	AL	✓	✓	✓		
Rumnique Gill (Lay Trustee)	RG	P	A	✓		
Liz Williams (Lay Trustee)	LW	✓	✓	✓		
Vacant (Lay Trustee)	-	N/M	N/M	N/M		
Ibrahim Hamid (Student Trustee)	IH	A	A	N/M		
Tofunmi Odugbemi (Student Trustee)	TO	✓	✓	P		
Saundarya Rastogi (Student Trustee)	SR	N/M	N/M	✓		

Key: "✓" = Present, "A" = Apologies given, "N/M" = Non-member, "P" = Partial attendance, 'X' = Non-attendance

Included in the circulation	Initials	Reason and Meeting Section
Philip Gilks	PG	Chief Executive (Company Secretary)
Sayed Alkadiri	SA	Interim Deputy Chief Executive
Jeni Turner	JT	Head of Finance
Chris Moore	CM	Head of Communications and Business Development
Aadam Ali	AA	Clerk

Informal

Guest Speaker: Social Engine

The Board received a presentation from Avis Johns (AJ) Director and Cofounder of Social Engine who presented the research findings from the Union's future strategy development. She noted from the findings, the Union is in a very strong position from a backdrop of strengths from the previous strategy development. The findings are split into design, scoping and evidence. AJ stated the questions posed to students gave a good sense of what students are looking for. Numerous stakeholder interviews with senior leadership at City had positive perceptions of the Union. The report found that the top priority for students is the best possible education, the qualifications to be successful in jobs and meeting new people. Most students expressed they were very satisfied with the Union however one fifth of the population found themselves feeling neutral towards the Union which AJ highlighted as a key group the Union should engage with as part of the new strategy. From the findings, students gave less priority

to being politically active and campaigning, pursuing hobbies and interests and taking part in sports and recreation. Community and belonging were highlighted as key themes that the Union should pursue and what the Union does well on a micro level and a macro level should blend together.

The Board thanked AJ for her presentation. She answered the following questions for the Board:

- AJ explained that the students that felt ambivalent towards the Union could be a risk or an opportunity. Several students who were in this category were commuter students with limited time or neurodivergent students who wanted course materials and their student experience to be more accessible for them.
- AJ agreed with the Board noting that the student experience should be segmented which would be key going forward with the new strategy. This would be tailored to schools and would focus on removing barriers. The Union has a key opportunity to position itself to be more relevant to the student membership and become even more legitimate.
- AJ answered that in terms of the Union being truly representative in these findings, this was explored at the stakeholder interviews and in the student focus groups to see whether the Union truly represented students with different ethnicities, genders, and sexualities.

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

GT welcomed SR, the Union's new Student Trustee. Apologies were received from FS and YK. GT noted that the meeting was not quorate as the Union's Articles of Association stipulate a quorate meeting must include a minimum of two Sabbatical Officer Trustees.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Paper: BT2240)

The Board **noted** the register, and no new interests were declared.

3. Minutes and Actions

3.1 The Board **noted** the Minutes of the meeting held on the 06 December 2022 as being a true and accurate record however they were not approved due to the meeting not being quorate.

(Paper: BT2241M)

3.2 The Board **noted** the Matters Arising (Paper: BT2242A), noting the following:

- The management account action paused whilst other priorities are focussed on and until the Finance Team are back to full capacity and the action is scheduled to be completed by September 2023.
- The Student Officers have no current update on speaking with the original students who proposed the BDS motion as part of the Legal Advice Follow up action.

4. Decisions taken between the meetings

GT and NR as Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board received the resignation of AP as both a Sabbatical Officer and Trustee.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

No items in Section F – Starred Items for Information were unstarred therefore all these items were **noted** by the Board.

Section A – Update from the Chief Executive and Strategic Progress

6. Chief Executive Report (Paper: BT2243)

The Board considered the Chief Executive report, which included updates on key projects, recruitment and staff matters which PG presented. He highlighted the following from his report:

- PG highlighted several staff changes that have taken place including a new Student Voice Coordinator, a replacement Academic Advisor (although the new additional Advisor role was not filled, a new recruitment is underway), a new Communities and Events Coordinator, a replacement Representation and Democracy Coordinator and a new Employability and Micro Placement Coordinator.
- PG updated the Board that currently, the University has frozen recruitment due to City endeavouring to make savings. The Union is fortunate as its funding is protected, and the additional City funded roles have already been recruited. The only risk would be if those roles left before September as it would be unlikely for them to be replaced.
- City has said it will be making budget cuts next year therefore the Union will be more sensitive when applying for funding as part of the block grant process.

The Board thanked PG and **noted** the Chief Executive report. SA updated the Board on the current Union elections noting that elections had been open for two days and at the time of the meeting, 2000 votes were cast with a total of 24 candidates standing. SA updated on several challenges including that a current candidate's behaviour has led to them to be disqualified in the elections.

7. Strategy Update Report (Paper: BT2244)

The Strategy Update Report was taken as read by PG.

The strategy update report was **noted** by the Board.

8. New Strategy Update Report (Paper: BT2245)

PG presented the New Strategy findings as talked about in the guest speaker section of the meeting. He noted the following:

- PG said that after discussing the report in the guest speaker section, the paper presents a timeline for the new strategy and how this would look. A high-level strategic document will be presented to the Board in the May meeting and an underpinning financial and operations plan will be submitted for approval at the July away day.
- PG echoed the importance of how the Union positions itself going forward. In terms of the Union having a segmented approach with students, staff resource will need to be considered in terms of reshuffling roles across the organisation.
- PG noted the importance of the Union rebranding itself in line with the new strategy and where the Union wishes to position itself. City have completed a rebranding exercise also therefore it would be beneficial for the Union to consider this also.

The Board discussed the following:

- PG clarified for the Board that departments at City can technically compete with elements and services of what the Union provides therefore it is important to create its own branding exploring how this connects with students.
- CM noted that students need to be able to connect with what the Union as it represents them and presently, not all students are aware that the Union exists and what it offers. A new brand would support what the Union does day to day.
- PG noted that Social Engine could be used for the rebranding process as they have worked with the Union previously, however there are other options. This would cost around £20,000.00 for the agency fees which would not require a tender process unless it exceeded this figure.

- The Board noted the importance of having a cohesive brand and how valuable this would be to the organisation. The Board also noted the importance of the Union's branding complementing City's branding.

The Board **noted** the New Strategy Update report and supported the decision to enlist a branding agency to complete a rebranding exercise for the Union [**Action**].

9. Internal Audit

(Paper: BT2246)

PG presented the paper on the recent Internal Audit. He highlighted the following:

- PG explained that the last internal audit took place in 2016. The results for this year's internal audit are very favourable for the Union and it is believed to be very well run by the University.
- The audit had 0 recommendations for the Union demonstrating how positively the Union performed as no other University department achieved this. Reputationally, this is very helpful for the Union.
- The only recommendations that effect the Union are for City, due to how the Union is captured in City's governing documents.

The Board **noted** the Internal Audit paper and results.

10. Potential Merger with St. Georges, University of London

PG presented a verbal update on the potential merger with St. Georges, University of London. He highlighted the following:

- PG highlighted that City is in conversation with St. Georges, University of London to potentially merge with them. PG explained that St. George's is a medical based University in Tooting, South London with around 4000 students.
- A decision will be made by both University Councils by the 28th March. PG noted that if both choose to proceed, this will have implications on the final merged University's name.
- The Union will be impacted as St. Georges has it's own Students' Union. Longer term, PG said it would be unlikely for the University to recognise two Students' Unions, and this would diminish political and lobbying power and would also not be a good use of resource.
- PG noted that one option could include City merging with St. Georges Students' Union which would mean either one charity takes over the other or both charities would be wound up and form a brand-new charity.
- PG noted some challenges would include the distance between both Universities which is around a 45 minute to an hour commute and the Union would need to change branding in the retail shop on merchandise, signage, legal fees and costs for a potential name change.

The Board **noted** PG's update on the potential merger. The Board asked about the timeline going forward if this went ahead. PG said that there are two options, September 2024 and September 2027. NR noted that it would take a longer time to merge systems and process and a longer-term cultural change.

Section B - Student Insight

11. Sabb Spotlight

(Paper: BT2247)

GT presented on her progress as President and highlighted the following points:

- GT noted the Union supported students during the recent UCU Strike action. The Officers gave out flyers with information on spaces to study during the strikes with free tea and coffee, conducted a survey for students about how they felt during the strike

action (currently have 240 responses), and the Union also scrutinised the mitigations that are being put in place by each School as a result.

- After the redistribution of priorities, GT will be representing the school of Health and Psychological Sciences.
- GT is launching a campaign for International Women's Day and International Women's Month in March. She will be focussing on the achievements of women throughout history.
- GT is closely working with City's Mental Health Team and will be organising activities for Mental Health Day on the 9th March.

GT presented on FS's progress as Deputy President and highlighted the following points:

- FS hosted a talent hunt show where students came to showcase their talent. The event was quite successful with over 70 students attending.
- FS is supporting students struggling to pay their fees and is campaigning for an instalment system to pay back fees as opposed to them having to withdraw.
- FS is working collaboratively with PhD students to produce a newsletter on EDI.
- FS is campaigning to improve the registration system so students do not get kicked out.

GS presented on YK's progress as Deputy President and highlighted the following points:

- Following the earthquakes that happened in Turkey and Syria, YK organised a commemorative event for all students including those from Turkey and Syria, to speak. City's Senior Leadership Team also attended reminding students about the support available.
- YK continues to work on improving catering at City and now sits on the Catering Board, some improvements include a £3 saver meal with extended hours from 4pm to 7pm, 99p filtered coffee and free hot water for students.
- YK is working on a bike scheme project as part of the cost-of-living campaign to help students that are commuters.
- YK has implemented a new start-up funding for new societies where every new society will get £50 for their first meet and greet.

The Board thanked the Sabbatical Officer team and commended them on their work and **noted** their reports. The Board asked about the University's provision of mental health services as this was of some concern a few months ago. GS replied noting that the services had greatly improved with shorter wait times for counselling and a more proactive and collaborative approach.

Section C – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

12. EDI Committee

(Paper: BT2248)

GT updated the Board on the most recent meeting of the EDI Committee highlighting the following:

- The EDI Committee's three main priorities this term will be supporting LGBTQI+ students of colour, Jewish students and Chinese students.
- The LGBTQI+ Working Group is lobbying City to remove a quote of JK Rowling's displayed on the lower ground floor of the College Building due to anti-trans rhetoric.
- The Union organised a Holocaust Memorial Day and antisemitism awareness events which was received well by students.

The Board **noted** the EDI Committee update. PG noted that he attended an antisemitism awareness training event organised by Middlesex University's Vice Chancellor for senior leaders. PG highlighted the importance of viewing the experience of the student body

through different lenses, such as race and faith, and considering the Jewish student body and recognising them in the student population. The Union is also improving the lens in which it views antisemitism, homophobia and transphobia amongst the student population.

Section D – Finance

13. January Management Accounts

(Paper: BT2249)

JT presented the January Management Accounts highlighting the following points:

- JT noted this set of accounts are at the 6-month mark in the financial year.
- On expenditure budget underspends, JT explained that meetings have already taken place with Managers and underspends discussed. There will be another re-forecast meeting in March when the Finance Team will look at the expenditure budgets again to assess spending levels and consider any re-forecasts that might be necessary.
- JT noted that there has also been significant savings on staff costs due to the delayed appointment of staff.
- JT said that City have agreed to increase the block grant to cover the costs of three of the new posts in the Union. This income will be received in July 2023 and will be offset against the salary costs that will accrue for the remainder of the year. This will therefore be approximately a net zero transaction.
- The year-to-date comparison of the budget V Forecast shows that the Union is currently expecting to be reasonably close to the budget at the year end.
- JT noted the Finance Team are looking at upgrading the Union's accounting software, Sage. This would allow expenses to be automated and would be more robust promoting online working.

The Board thanked JT and she answered the following for the Board.

- The risk of City clawing back unspent funds would not be possible, however this could affect future block grant bids.
- Spending plans will be brought forward as the Union does not want to be in a position in May or June where departments are under pressure to spend large amounts of budgeted income.
- PG said some of the underspend will be used for the brand review. The Union needs to use the money it has been allocated to demonstrate it's relevance.
- The Board suggested the Union may wish to begin to build a budget for the potential merger. PG noted that the University would very likely pay for any costs arising from the merger.

The Board **noted** the January Management Accounts.

Section E - Starred items for approval

There were not Starred item for approval submitted at this meeting.

Section F - Starred items for information

14. Advice Service Annual report

(Paper: BT2250)

PG thanked the Advice Team for their work in aiding the Union achieve the Advice AQS Mark. This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

15. Student Trustee Appointment

(Paper: BT2251)

This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

16. Data Protection Report

(Paper: BT2252)

This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

Section G - Other**17. 2023/24 Dates**

(Paper: BT2253)

PG presented the Board of Trustees and EDI Committee meeting dates for 2023/24 to the Board. JT noted that the 23rd May Board meeting may receive the March management accounts instead of the April accounts due to timings.

The Board **agreed** the dates for all Board and EDI Committee meeting dates for 2023/2024.

18. Any Other Business

PG noted that after a successful petition signed by a minimum of 300 students, the Union will hold a referendum as to whether it should disaffiliate from NUS UK and NUS Charity. He noted it would be one question asking if the Union should disaffiliate from both and to pass, it would require a minimum of at least 5% of the Student Members to cast a vote and a simple majority of the vote will pass the motion. PG noted it would take one calendar year to disaffiliate if the motion passed, and it would impact the Union's budget as training opportunities, conferences and commercial opportunities could be limited.

PG asked the Board to consider attendance for meetings going forward as being either all in person or online as hybrid meetings have proved challenging to facilitate and engage with for Trustees but at the same time, he recognised that some Trustees would find attending in person difficult with long travel times. **Action: The Board to discuss whether meetings should be held in person or online at the Trustees Away Day.**

19. Trustees Only Business

All staff left the meeting, and this section of the meeting has no minutes.

Date of the next meeting: 4.30pm, 23 May 2023

Board Clerk: Aadam Ali