

Board of Trustees Minutes

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16:30 PM, 29 March 2021 | via MS Teams

Members	Initials	Meeting 1 05.10.20	Meeting 2 01.12.2020	Meeting 3 02.02.2021	Meeting 4 29.03.2021	Meeting 5 25.05.2021
Saqlain Riaz (President) (Chair)	SR	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ruqaiyah Javaid (VP Education)	RJ	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Shaima Dallali (VP Community and Wellbeing)	SD	✓	A	✓	✓	
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	AL	A	✓	✓	✓	
Clare Searle (Lay Trustee)	CS	✓	✓	A	✓	
Rumnique Gill (Lay Trustee)	RG	A	✓	✓	✓	
Karim Akbar Khan (Lay Trustee)	KK	N/M	N/M	N/M	A	
Katherine Higgs (Student Trustee)	KH	✓	N/M	N/M	NM	
Ghayathri Sivakumar (Student Trustee)	GS	✓	N/M	N/M	NM	
Ibrahim Hamid (Student Trustee)	IH	N/M	N/M	✓	A	

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)
Margaret O'Donnell	MOD	Head of Finance
Hannah Roberts	HR	Deputy Chief Executive
Katharyn Kingwill	KKi	Governance Administrator (Minute Taker)

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

Apologies were received from KK and IH.

2. Declarations of Interest

Noted.

(Paper: BT 2037)

3. Minutes

3.1 Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees 02 February 2021

The Board **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 02 February 2021. (Paper: BT2038M)

The Board **approved** the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees on 02 February 2021. (Paper: BT2039M)

3.2 Actions Arising (Paper: BT2040A)

The Board noted all actions were addressed on the agenda with the exception of action minute ref: 10, Staff Salary Review, which will be actioned in the summer term when there is more clarity on the budget position.

4. Decisions taken between meetings

The Board had sought legal advice on the proposed IHRA Referendum, provided for information in item 16, but had made no formal decisions between meetings.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

There were no items brought forward by the Chair.

6. Minutes of Executive Committee Meetings (Paper: BT2041)

The Board noted a summary of meetings of the Executive Committee held on 10 February and 04 March, and welcomed the new format of the report.

7. Student Council

The Board noted a summary of a meeting of the Student Council held on 04 February. The following point was noted:

- The meeting had gone well with good discussion of motions.
- This indicates improvement from previous years; the ongoing Democracy Review could further enhance this.

Strategy

8. Strategy Update Report (Paper: BT2043)

The Board considered an update report on the Strategy with summaries of activities supporting the four Strategic Operational Plan priorities. Progress was being made in some areas in spite of the limitations caused by Covid-19 inhibiting onsite activity. A key highlight was the achievement of the Advice Quality Standard kite-mark for the Students' Union Advice Service. In discussion:

- The Board congratulated the Advice Team; the award of the AQS kite-mark was excellent news and set the service apart from other student unions.
- SR relayed the congratulations from City's Council on this achievement, noted at their meeting on 26th March.
- HR circulated to the Board the Student Voice Report (Priority 3).

9. Strategy Operations Plan and Strategy Extension (Paper: BT2044)

The Board considered a draft revised Operations Plan and a proposal to extend the period of the current Strategy for a further year to July 2023. In discussion, the following points were noted:

- The impact of the pandemic had stalled progress in some areas, with actions still to be implemented.
- The original timeline for the development of the Strategy was that the research phase would commence in October 2021, however, in light of Covid, this would be challenging as the student experience was likely to remain far from normal for the remainder of the year. PG noted that City was currently planning for a number of scenarios for education delivery in the autumn term, with the most likely to be a 'blended' delivery model, with some lectures online and some in-person teaching for most students, with an assumption that some social distancing would still be required.

- Strategy Priority Leads had been asked to review their current action plans and associated projects to see what could realistically be achieved in the short term. The Strategy had been created to provide flexibility on delivery throughout the period and adapt to changes in the student experience; the review of projects would also be taking this into account with revisions to reflect what had changed since its launch in addition to the impact of Covid 19.
- CS asked whether a one year extension was sufficient given that there was still such uncertainty around next year. PG noted that by the autumn of 2022 it was likely that everyone would have returned to campus therefore the revised timeline proposed that the research phase take place in autumn 2022, with a collaborative writing phase planned for early 2023 to develop the Strategy for approval by the Board at its May meeting, with the public launch planned for the start of the next academic year in August 2023.
- SR supported the proposal to extend the period of the current Strategy as the Union were keen to consolidate progress made to date with a period of embedding processes.
- RG commented that the Priorities remained key issues for students and welcomed the flexibility written into the Strategy to permit revisions to the Operations Plan.
- PG would bring an update to the next meeting as there should be more information on the 2021/22 budget by then and suggested that the Board could approve a final revised Operations Plan at the summer Away Day. SR suggested that this be circulated to the Board in advance so that Trustees would have an opportunity to read and comment. **[Action]**
- The extension to the Strategy would be noted in student communications.

Decision

The Board **approved** the proposed extension to the Strategy to July 2023 and noted the revisions to the Strategy Operations Plan. A final version would be approved at the summer Away Day.

Executive

10. Chief Executive Report

(Paper: BT2045)

The Board considered the Chief Executive's report. PG highlighted the following:

- There was no change to current Covid 19 restrictions but it was hoped to reopen the Reception and the shop next term as a number of students would be on campus for assessments.
- The Governance Administrator had left the Union for a new role. PG was now considering whether it would be a better use of resource to employ an external clerk for Board meetings and ad hoc projects now that many of the Union's policies had been updated. He would take into account other tasks covered by this role, but noted that this resource might be more usefully allocated to cover other areas, such as a permanent post for social media.
- PG had contributed to the NUS Big SU Survey – People and HR; he hoped this would provide useful insights in due course.
- The introduction of the external support package delivered by Coole Insight for Sabbatical Officers was a very helpful addition to the internal support provided.
- SD and RG provided an update from the Race Equality Working Group which met on 25th March. Discussions included the use of equality impact assessments, accountability and impact on student groups. Liberation Officers would be invited to the next meeting to provide their feedback. The Group are considering whether some EDI training should be mandatory.
- Meetings had taken place with City's Property & Facilities (PAF) colleagues and with Space Management Committee to discuss the management of the CityBar

space. The next stage would be to engage some consultancy to undertake further development of the proposal.

- The Board noted the updated staffing structure and training undertaken.
- PG and HR would circulate the details of the Students' Union Awards when finalised so that Board members could attend if possible. The ceremony would be online with some live elements if possible. **[Action]**
- The Board noted the Union Advice Term 1 Report.

Finance, Risk and Audit

11. Management Accounts February 2021 (Paper: BT2046)

The Board noted the February management accounts:

- MOD noted that there had been little change since the last meeting but some areas had been identified which would lessen the projected underspend.
- There was some concern that the budget underspend would lead to a reduced block grant from City next year.
- MOD would meet colleagues in Finance to discuss the funding allocation for in-band salary increments as the appropriate adjustment was still to be made following the reversal of the initial University decision not to implement these.
- MOD would send to AL the full Balance Sheet. **[Action]**
- Suggestions to address the underspend could be to allocate funding for consultancy on the use of the CityBar space or an additional member of staff in 2021-22.

12. Appointment of Auditors 2021-2024 (Paper: BT2047)

The Board considered the recommendation from AL, PG and MOD to appoint External Auditors from 2021 -2024. Four companies had been invited to tender with three expressing an interest, including the current supplier, Knox Cropper, who were considered by the panel to be the preferred bidder. The company had been given feedback on areas for future improvement.

Decision

The Board **approved** the re-appointment of Knox Cropper as External Auditors from 2021 -2024.

13. Budget 2021-22

The Board noted the progress made towards the 2021-22 Budget. The Union was awaiting confirmation of its funding from City but University departments had been asked to achieve cost savings of 2 - 4% in their budgets for next year. It was not yet clear whether this would apply to the Union therefore a number of scenarios were being developed; a further update would come to the next meeting.

Governance and Related

14. Lay Trustee Appointment (Paper: BT2049)

The Board **noted** the appointment of a new Lay Trustee, Karim-ullah Akbar Khan (Karim Khan). In discussion the following points were noted:

- The calibre of the applicants identified via the Recruitment Consultants was excellent and validated the decision taken by the Board to undertake an independent selection process rather than accepting a suggested nomination from City's Council.
- It would be sensible for the Board to continue to seek suggestions from Council in the first instance when vacancies arose as the relationship with Council was an

important one for the Union, but it was equally important that the Board should ensure that it appointed Trustees with the appropriate skills mix.

- Council did have a nominated link who acted as a 'mentor' for the SU President. SR noted that this was a useful relationship and that they met regularly.

15. Returning Officer's Report

(Paper: BT2050)

The Board **noted** the Returning Officer's Report for the Spring Elections 2021. Elections had taken place in February and had been entirely online; turnout had improved from last year with 14.8% registered students voting. Twenty Executive Officer positions had been contested by 66 candidates. In discussion the Board noted the following:

- The Board congratulated the team on all their hard work to ensure successful elections in a challenging environment.
- The number and quality of candidates was positive news and could be an indication that online elections increased accessibility.
- The team was looking forward to working with the incoming Officers on the actions proposed in manifestos.
- There had been a number of complaints received concerning campaigning conduct, particularly around direct campaigning on social media, therefore some additional guidance had been issued to candidates. HR suggested that it might be appropriate to revise Bye-Law 4 to clarify the position on collective campaigning or even remove this requirement from the Bye-Laws to allow the Returning Officer to publish rules annually. This could be considered as part of the Democracy Review and included in the recommendations.
- The Returning Officer had declared the elections to be free and fair.
- The Board congratulated the incoming Officers.

16. IHRA Anti-Semitism Definition Referendum

(Paper: BT2051)

The Board received an update on the Referendum asking students whether the University should reject the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism with a summary of actions. The outcome was now known as voting had closed on 25th March; a majority of students who voted had supported the motion to reject the definition. In discussion the following points were made:

- The team had worked hard to ensure that the process to run the Referendum had run smoothly and to mitigate the risks identified by the Board at its last meeting. The debate held on 18th March was a particular highlight with good participation, an effective chair and respectful discussion.
- The team would reflect on the legal advice received but this had been clear on the legitimacy of the Referendum as being within the Union's objects. The Board noted that it was important that Union actions going forward were also within its remit.
- The result of the Referendum had been communicated to City and students; SR had also met City's President last week to discuss.
- There had been little comment on the outcome in the media so far but it was anticipated that there could be more once Passover ended.
- The decision of whether the University would adopt the IHRA definition, as required by the Secretary of State for Education, would be taken by the President who was leading the University Consultation.
- PG provided a formal notice to the Board that one student had terminated their membership of the Union; he will inform City of this, as required. SD will meet the student to discuss this action within the next few days.
- The Board noted the proportion of students voting in the Referendum in relation to the total number of registered students at City, but as the number had exceeded the limit of 500 provided for in the Articles of Association the result was valid.
- There were issues that the Board could reflect on in relation to decisions around Referendums going forward, in particular around initial proposals which could

include a summary of governance issues and Board responsibilities so there could be a fuller debate at an early stage of risks and mitigations.

- NR noted that there had been a second opportunity to discuss the Referendum at the Board meeting in February.
- RG noted that learning points from the Referendum could be informed by EDI initiatives, to understand at an early stage the possible impact of such actions on some groups and to be able to demonstrate this understanding.
- SR reported that Council had met on 26th March and discussed the progress of the President's Consultation on the IHRA Definition. Council had noted and supported the intent underlying the IRHA definition but not the wording and therefore their view was that the best course would be not to adopt the definition but to acknowledge it in some way.
- SR noted that he had relayed to the President that the SU supported an alternative definition of anti-Semitism.
- Next steps were to meet with representatives from Jewish students and provide a response to the formal complaint received from the Jewish Society. The University Chaplain had agreed to facilitate a discussion on a way forward; a Lay Trustee could be invited to attend this discussion. PG noted that work would be required to build confidence and that this could take some time.
- The basis of the complaint from the Jewish Society was that the result of the Referendum could be predicted given that supporters of the IHRA definition would be a minority in the student body. CS suggested that the Board acknowledge this as part of the formal response.
- She also suggested that a governance process could be developed to clarify how the Board responded to formal complaints.
- SR noted that there were a number of communities who had felt excluded over the years and more thought could be given as to how Sabbatical Officers engaged with such groups.
- SD noted that the Union Executive had worked hard and successfully to ensure that the Referendum went forward in a safe environment; this demonstrated an ability to debate contentious issues which was a positive outcome.
- SR recommended that the Trustees receive updates from *WonkHE*, an organisation which provided objective analysis of current issues in the sector; PG invited Lay Trustees to contact him if they wished for this to be set up. **[Action]**

Decision

The Board **noted** the update on the IHRA Referendum and requested that the draft response to the formal complaint from the Jewish Society be circulated to the Board for comment and endorsement. **[Action]**

17. Risk Register

(Paper: BT2052)

The Board **approved** the revised Risk Register. The Format of the Risk Register had reverted to normal but with reference to the impact of Covid 19, in line with Charity Commission recommendations. In discussion the following points were noted:

- SR provided an update on the University's financial position, following discussion at Council and SIPCo (Strategy, Implementation and Performance Committee). City was anticipating lower registrations for 2021-22 from international students but an increase in the number of home students. This meant that the financial position were relatively stable at City, unlike some other HEIs, however, services had been asked to achieve cost savings of around 2-5%.
- There was some risk around a reduction to the funding allocation from City for next year given the requirement to achieve savings, so the risk score remained at 10. There would be some extra resource for micro-placements but the likelihood

was that the Union would be asked to work within current resource for the next 24 months.

Decision

The Board **approved** the Risk Register.

18. Publishing Policy

(Paper: BT2053)

Decision

The Board **approved** the revised Publishing Policy which had been updated in line with the requirement to review every three years. Changes were not substantive but the opportunity had been taken to streamline the complaints procedure and align this with Bye-Law 13.

19. Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure

(Paper: BT2054)

The Board considered the revised Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure, updated in line with the requirement to review every years but also as a result of the Advice Quality Standard audit which had recommended revision and review of the Policy to ensure compliance and as a condition of the award. The major change was the introduction of a Safeguarding Register for recording and monitoring safeguarding compliance and good practice. In discussion:

- RG suggested the addition of flowcharts to the Policy to assist with signposting.
- Safeguarding training was provided by City but this included Prevent, which the Union opposed, so it could become necessary to source an alternative training provider.
- NR commented that the NSPCC provided training which was separate to Prevent.
- The Union did interact with City processes although it was independent. There was a new online reporting tool, You Report, We Support, and a Sharepoint Hub for information.

Decision

The Board **approved** the revisions to the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and procedure.

20. Volunteers Policy

(Paper: BT2055)

Decision

The Board **approved** the revised and updated Volunteers Policy. Changes were not substantive.

21. Bye-Law Amendment: Change the LGBT Officer title to LGBTQ+ Officer

(Paper: BT2056)

Decision

The Board **approved** the proposed minor change to Bye-law 6 to amend the title of LGBT Officer to LGBTQ+ Officer.

22. Bye-Law Amendment: Remove compulsory membership fees for Student Groups

(Paper: BT2057)

Decision

The Board **approved** the proposed change the Bye-Law 11, Student Union Groups, to remove compulsory memberships fees for student groups, noting that some groups did not need funding in order to undertake activities and that the removal of this requirement could increase membership of societies and therefore student engagement.

23. Hospitality, Travel and Expenses Policy

(Paper: BT2058)

Decision

The Board **approved** the revised Hospitality, Travel and Expenses Policy. The policy had been revised to align with the City Hospitality, Travel and Expenses Policy.

Other

24. Any Other Business

The next meeting of the Board would take place on 24th May.

PG would advise the Board if there was any change to the date of the Away Day currently scheduled for 12th July.

25. Trustees Only Business

Discussion with Trustees only, with no attendees present, and which was not minuted.