

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).

12 December 2023 | C103, Tait Building

Members	Initials	Meeting 1 12.09.23	Meeting 2 12.12.23	Meeting 3 05.03.24	Meeting 4 21.05.24	Meeting 5 15.07.24
Akanksha Kumar (President) (Chair)	AK	✓	A			
Fortune Sampson (Deputy President)	FS	✓	✓			
Yavuz Emin Kafadar (Deputy President)	YK	✓	✓			
Jackson He (Deputy President)	JH	✓	✓			
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓	✓			
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	AL	X	✓			
Liz Williams (Lay Trustee)	LW	✓	✓			
Leila Ratnani (Lay Trustee)	LR	N/M	✓ N/M			
Rachel Brown (Lay Trustee)	RB	N/M	✓			
Jas Ahluwalia (Lay Trustee)	JA	N/M	A			
Saundarya Rastogi (Student Trustee)	SR	✓	N/M			
Eva O'Neill (Student Trustee)	EO	N/M	✓			
Prachi Barache (Student Trustee)	PB	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)
Jeni Turner	JT	Head of Finance
Chris Moore	CM	Head of Communications and Business Development
Aadam Ali	AA	Clerk

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

NR welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked the Board to introduce themselves for the new Trustees. Apologies were received from AK and JA.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Paper: BT2322)

The Board **noted** the register, and no new interests were declared. New Trustees who had been unable to complete their declaration of interest form declared that they had no conflicts of interest with any items on the agenda or business to be discussed.

3. Minutes

3.1 The Board **approved** the Minutes of the meeting held on the 12 September 2023 as being a true and accurate record.

(Paper: BT2323M)

3.2 The Board **noted** the Matters Arising (Paper: BT2324A), noting the following:

- The in-person vs online Board meeting action was completed as recruitment of the new External Trustees had made it clear that meetings would take place in person unless in exceptional circumstances.
- The Senate Student Members Appointment action is yet to be completed but the deadline for this is March 2024.
- The Trustee Recruitment action was completed. A paper on this detailing the results was scheduled in agenda item 10- Trustee Recruitment.
- The St. Georges Merger action had been started, more information was provided in the Board papers and a full plan will be developed once City signs an agreement.
- The Sabb Spotlight action is yet to be completed and the Sabbs provided an update in item 11- Sabb Spotlight.
- The NSS Paper action had been completed and actions on how to improve the Union's scores have been taken on.
- The EDI Committee action for the Board to select a Lay Trustee to Co-Chair the Committee was complete and was discussed in item 14- EDI Committee.
- The Audit Plan action to provide an evaluation on the current auditing services and the option to retender for next year had not yet begun due to capacity but would be presented at the next meeting in March 2024.
- The Returning Officer (RO) action for the Election Byelaw and structure of RO and Deputy Returning Officers will be reviewed if and when the Union merges with St. Georges.

4. Decisions taken between the meetings

There were no decisions taken by the Board of Trustees between meetings however, the Appointments Committee have appointed EO and PB as Student Trustees and JA, RB and LR as Lay Trustees all with immediate effect except for PB who began their term when SR completed their studies, and LR from the 13 December 2023 after LW steps down.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

NR noted that item 15 Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2023 would be discussed first as Knox Cropper would be presenting after which they would leave the meeting, and the remainder of the agenda would be discussed in numerical order.

No items in Section E – Starred Items for Approval or Section F – Starred Items for Information were unstarred therefore all items were **approved** and **noted** by the Board respectively.

Section A – Update from the Chief Executive and Strategic Progress

6. Chief Executive Report

(Paper: BT2325)

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

- PG noted that this term had been the busiest that he had experienced in the Union due to diminished capacity and the drastic rise in student engagement.

- PG said that a new Academic Advisor had been appointed and inducted. PG had also completed interviews for the newly created fixed-term Operations and Projects Manager who the panel have decided to offer to a candidate. Lastly, PG said that the Representation and Democracy Coordinator had handed in their notice after four years, therefore the team will readvertise that position.
- PG highlighted that the largest area of work this term had been the middle east conflict including dealing with allegations of antisemitism, preventing freedom of speech and safety on campus. Recent events held or coming up on campus included the Palestinian Ambassador, Head Rabi of the UK and other more high profile speakers.
- PG noted that the growth in student groups on campus had been rapid with the Union recording 192 student groups between September to November, the highest ever recorded. PG also noted that these groups had held 310 events on campus to date which have required staff time to check, seek external checks, booking security and spaces.
- PG has written a paper to Finance Board at City requesting additional £30,000 funding for student groups to apply for and utilise, a 1 FTE Communities Coordinator, a 0.5 FTE Finance Coordinator, additional £10,000 in temporary staff cost, an additional £30,000 for Wow events at the Winter Festival and an additional £54,685 for the 12-month Operations and Project Manager.
- PG recently attended the NUS Strategic Conversations conference and ran a session with other Students' Unions on the growth of the Union over the past 7 years.
- Lastly, PG presented the updated Student Gateway presentation which showed the new space and furnishings for the Union's new home from August 2024. This would include a Union Reception in the main walkway, a more central location in the Drysdale Building which would be more student focussed, a new common room, hotdesking for staff and multi-purpose spaces that students can access. PG said this would enable students to have spaces where they could relax, host events, have a safe space for EDI groups and access Staff and Officers in a more open setting.

The Board thanked PG and **noted** the Chief Executive report. The Board commented with the following:

- The Board highlighted that following previous records of staff savings in the accounts, the Union should utilise resources whenever possible to help support capacity. PG agreed and noted the new Operations and Project Manager would provide vital support and the Deputy Chief Executive will be returning in February 2024. This would free some of PG's time for strategic work.
- The Board expressed concern about staff burnout and enquired about ways help support staff including an accelerated employee support programme and more all-hands meetings for staff to help them transition into the new open space.
- PG shared the Board's concerns and noted that increased engagement effected pockets of teams within the Union such as Finance and the Communities team. PG noted that City provide a generous counselling service and employee assistance programme. PG also noted that the new space may feel scary for some staff initially however the change would be necessary in how staff work in the future culture. The SLT have provided more briefings to staff to help staff feel more included in topics such as the Student Gateway project and the St. George's merger.

7. Strategy Update Report

(Paper: BT2326)

PG presented the Strategy Update Report and highlighted the following points for the Board:

- PG presented the report format which had been updated at the last Board meeting.
- PG said the Report showed more of a summary of different projects the Union is working on with a scale from stuck to completed.
- PG noted some projects were small whereas others were much larger.

- PG highlighted the Sports Development and Transfer project was very large and something the Union is proud of to mark as completed, the Student Check-Ins projects has also been marked as completed.
- PG stated that the status rating for each project is scored by the Managers, and that the implementation plan of these projects is presented in the next paper.

The Board asked about the four areas marked as stuck and why these are marked as such. PG updated that the items marked as stuck were due to capacity issues in the Student Engagement Team on that grant project, projects such as change management were being led by the Deputy CEO who left at short notice, the employee wellbeing project could be completed later in the year and the email and marketing strategy platform had been marked as stuck due to staff sickness in that team. PG noted that most projects the Union are on track to complete, and that this report would be updated and brought back regularly to the Board.

The Strategy Update Report was **noted** by the Board.

8. **Strategy Implementation Plan Revisions** (Paper: BT2327)

PG presented the Strategy Implementation Plan Revisions and noted it had been updated for the Board to approve which included changes to names of roles in the Union, how the Union talks about things and where it is aiming to get to.

The Board **approved** the revisions to the Strategy Implementation Plan.

9. **St. Georges Update** (Paper: BT2328)

PG presented the St. Georges Update and highlighted the following points:

- PG updated that that City had not yet decided to merge however this is highly likely.
- City is aspiring to merge legally on the 1st August 2024 and operationally following this.
- PG confirmed the Union have started conversations with lawyers to complete due diligence and both Unions have an informal Memorandum of Understanding in place which include red lines for both organisations.
- PG noted that the students will need to vote via referendum on a name change and other necessary changes to the Union, whereas the University can merge as soon as they sign an agreement, subject to OfS approval. A referendum would require a five percent vote from students which is a significant number on a matter such as this.
- PG highlighted that ideally the referendum would take place alongside the Elections in February 2024 if City had reached an agreement, however, this will not occur due to the dates required to hold a referendum.
- PG explained most costs arising from the merger would be from the name change, changing stock in shops, sports kit and signage.
- Some challenges PG pointed out would be merging a ticketing platform, stock management and how finance software could be merged and utilised to reflect the workings of the newly merged organisation.
- PG said he was confident that if approached correctly, the best of both organisations could be harnessed to result in a brilliant, merged Union.

The Board thanked PG for the St. George's Update. The Board commented with the following:

- The Board asked about the risks associated with the merger including the name change. The Officers noted that students care about the merger and from their feedback, are against the name change and that this as a risk that will need to be mitigated. They noted that students would be unhappy to first hear about the name change from the Union and that the University should be doing more to keep them informed about the merger.

- JT noted another risk would be the financial software and end of year accounts, as amending existing software would take significant time and that some changes would need to be made sooner. The Board agreed this would require a strategy going forward.
- The Board enquired about how much communication City has given to students on the merger. PG responded that City have commissioned work around the name change with Redbrick Research but it is felt they could have done more research with students.

The Board thanked PG and **noted** the St. George's Update.

10. Trustee Recruitment

(Paper: BT2329)

PG presented the Trustee Recruitment paper and noted the process ran extremely well with Trustees Unlimited and that the Union has appointed five exceptional candidates as outlined in agenda item 4- Decisions taken between Meetings.

The Board **noted** the Trustee Recruitment paper.

Section B - Student Insight

11. Sabb Spotlight

(Paper: BT2330)

FS presented on his progress as Deputy President and highlighted the following points:

- FS has run a calculator project and has successfully lobbied the University to expand the list of pre-approved calculators in exams from 2 to 11. FS has persuaded City to give out free IT equipment vouchers and is planning to create a calculator loan scheme.
- FS triggered a change in City's visa fee reimbursement policy for current and future Sabbatical Officers to be reimbursed for visa fees and immigration health surcharge.
- FS submitted a paper on tuition fee instalment research to the Senate and Student Experience Board. The paper seeks to stop City from barring students who are unable to pay fees and instead use a multiple instalments payment plan.
- FS organised a Talent Hunt show with up to 10 contestants and over 100 students in attendance.

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

- AK successfully led the South Asian Week and Fair which was the first of its kind. The week saw six events celebrating south Asian heritage include dance, food and games.
- AK is progressing the plan for nap pods, and there is potential to have them included in the Student Gateway project.
- AK also oversees mental health and wellbeing in their portfolio and has been working with Union staff to shape the annual Studwell offer including alpacas on campus and creative events.
- AK has been working to offer a better connection between the schools and increased funding for student groups and a City Bar rebrand and City Sport accessibility.

YK presented on his progress as Deputy President and highlighted the following points:

- YK is working on catering to lower prices for meals. Catering prices are currently the highest voted issue on Unitu, and AK shared these concerns at the City Council meeting. YK said the £3 dinner meals had gone well and were frequently sold out.
- YK said the bike scheme had been started with 16 students subscribed so far. The Union hasn't done much promotion for it but a bike from Buzzbike has been purchased to show students on stalls to promote the scheme further.
- YK said a petition had started for a bidet project to happen on campus, where bidets would be installed in bathrooms. YK is reaching out to student groups for support and one supplier offered to install a free bidet on campus to raise awareness. YK has

successfully lobbied the sustainability department to support this also and would like City to be the first University with multiple bidets on campus.

JH presented on his progress as Deputy President and highlighted the following points:

- JH is planning the first ever Lunar New Year festival on campus with a range of activities and involvement from different East and Southeast Asian societies. The main attraction would be a lion dance performance which JH is searching for funding to happen and JH is hoping to get 400 student attendees. RB noted that they could assist with contacts regarding potential lion dance performers.
- JH is creating an online student handbook to be a 'secret guide' to being a student at City to improve communication between students and City. The handbook would be more student friendly and would include more visuals.
- JH said the financial analysis of the student financial burden is ongoing. JH is planning to introduce a bursary for students to access dependant on their household income. There is currently an existing bursary, but the household income amount must be zero and is assessed by Student Finance England.
- JH said a Muslim Fund project pilot is underway as many Muslim Students are unable to apply for the hardship fund as they need to exhaust all other loans first such as the maintenance loan which is not shariah compliant. JH said an application would be submitted to the City Access and Participation Planning team and assessed there. If this goes well, the project would be sought to be expanded and JH plans to ask Muslim Alumni to donate money to the fund for Muslim students.

The Board thanked the Sabbatical Officer team and commended them on their work and **noted** their reports.

12. Pre-Arrival Survey

(Paper: BT2331)

CM presented the Pre-Arrival Survey paper and took this as read.

The Board **noted** the Pre-Arrival Survey paper.

13. Check-Ins Report

(Paper: BT2332)

CM presented the Check-Ins Report and highlighted the following:

- CM introduced the survey and explained that it had taken place yearly since 2020 out of the pandemic to phone students to have a short conversation and check on their wellbeing. This has proved to gather great insight from students and what they think.
- CM noted that City have fully funded the Check-Ins project which has allowed it to be well resourced.
- CM explained that the Union create a pop up call centre who call students with a script of four sections, including campus experience, course experience, the cost of living crisis and student communication and support. This started this year in November and ran for two weeks.
- The Union had 790 hours of call time with students and spoke with 1876 students for a conversation that ran on average, 10-12 minutes with a total of 7892 numbers being dialled.
- On campus and course experience, 74% recorded a positive campus experience, and 89% rated their teaching experience as good.
- One in two students were concerned about their ability to financially support themselves and 78% of students felt a part of a community at City, but 12% did not.
- In total, 93% of students felt all or most of the essential information was communicated to them when joining and 80% of students felt confident in knowing where to go for support if they needed it.
- CM inferred that overall, students ideally would like the Union to run the same events 3-4 times a day or week. Students have days where they are not on campus and don't

want to pay to come in for events e.g. for Winter Fest. CM said the data shows students are cash and time poor which would require unique work to help bridge the gap between the Union and students.

- CM quoted AK as wanting to create a 'sticky' hub in campus to attract students and to make their relationship with City feel less transactional and more community based. Some challenges students faced on campus are finding a place to study therefore many students go home.
- Another thing CM said was that students would prefer to build their own timetable so that they could hold all their classes on fewer days, which is popular at other institutions but would require far more resources.
- Another key area CM said would require work would be the travel bursary which originally was available but could not sustain the number of students applying for it therefore is temporarily closed.

The Board thanked CM for presenting the report and made the following comments:

- The Board asked if the Check-Ins were still as valuable for City as they were during the pandemic. CM replied saying they are and City see a lot of value in it which is why they have continued to fund the project. CM noted that it may not be the perfect thing for right now as the Union is gaining similar levels of information year on year and more could be achieved using the same resource to have something in person like a chat box.
- PG noted that the Check-Ins is a multi-faceted project as most of the budget given for the project is spent on student staff which goes back to students. Also it is the only time of year when the Union has an actual conversation with so many students. PG thanked the Insight Coordinator for all their work on the project.

The Board **noted** the Check-Ins Report.

Section C – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

14. EDI Committee

(Paper: BT2333)

PG presented the EDI Committee update making the following points:

- PG said the current Committee was launched a year ago with the combination of Union staff, students, Student Officers, and Trustees, being formed of the Race Equity Group, LGBTQI+ Equity Group, Gender Equity Group and the Disability Equity Group.
- PG directed the Board to the paper which contained the minutes of the last Committee held, which highlighted the priorities of the group being student safety and getting feedback from specific underrepresented groups such as Jewish students on campus.
- PG also presented the Terms of Reference for the Committee for approval by the Board.
- PG asked the Lay Trustees of the Board if anyone would be willing to nominate themselves to Co-Chair the Committee alongside JH.

The Board **noted** the EDI Committee update, **approved** the Terms of Reference for the Committee and LR nominated themselves to Co-Chair the Committee, which the Board **approved**.

Section D – Finance

15. Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2023)

(Paper: BT2334)

NR welcomed Audit Partner Stephen Anderson (SA) and Audit Manager Christian James (CJ) from Knox Cropper, who gave a presentation on the Union's Report of the Trustees

and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2023 and were in attendance for item 15 only:

- SA noted that the account format had not changed from previous years and remain the same accounting format.
- SA pointed out the difference between unrestricted and restricted funds on pages 14-15 which are those being restricted being only used for Societies and Raise and Give, and unrestricted being used on the Unions charitable objectives.
- On the Statement of Financial Affairs, SA reported that the Union's income increased from £1,325,000 to £1,681,000 and expenditure for the year increased from £1,342,000 to £1,680,000.
- SA said some reasons for this were due to the Union's notional rent charge increasing by £51,000, Societies income increasing by £24,000 and main grants decreasing in miscellaneous income by £30,000.
- SA confirmed that the Union is in a financially healthy position with reserves of £574,000 and the Union having a strong banking position with £674,000.
- CJ confirmed that the audit ran smoothly, and Knox Cropper were satisfied with the audited accounts and report findings.
- CJ confirmed that the accounting policy is the same as last year. There were no material adjustments and that there were a few unadjusted areas due to VAT return which related to free events which qualified for an increase in VAT that was reclaimed.
- CJ highlighted that the only risk area that should be noted to the Board is under internal controls. This minor risk area relates to the approval of journal entries and not being approved first before being entered. This is however as a result of the Union being a small organisation and no specific issue was identified and is a matter of advice, based on best practice. Specifically, following best practice, those that are larger journals or non-routine should be approved before being entered.

The Board made the following comments:

- AL asked for further guidance for the Union on what SA and CJ thought would be the level of a journal that would require a dual signature. SA suggested that this should be one that is out of the ordinary and/or circa £10,000 and above – which is very rare in the Union.
- The Board noted the staff work that had been put into the audit which has led to a great audit result. LW questioned the level of reserves held and if this followed best practice and if there should be some provision the Union should begin setting aside for the potential merger with St. Georges.
- SA confirmed that according to the Charity Commission guidance, a Charity should not have more than 3 years annual expenditure as reserves. The Union's current reserves are 3-4 months, and are about sufficient but based on experience, on the lighter side according to SA, when best practice is between 6-12months.
- SA advised the Board could consider designating some funds for the merger even though it is yet to be confirmed. This could be a ring fenced amount that's agreed by Trustees next month if the merger is confirmed. SA also advised the Board to consider due diligence ahead of the merger and the structure of St. Georges and how that will fit with the Union. Additionally the Board may want to consider things like commercial income, VAT and software.

The Board thanked SA and **approved** the Report of the Trustees and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2023. The Board also **approved** the signing of Knox Cropper's letter of representation.

16. Management Accounts

(Paper: BT2335)

JT presented the Management Accounts and highlighted the following for the Board:

- JT presented the accounts which show the Union's first quarter of the financial year. JT said in summary the accounts show the integration of Sport into the Union. There has also been a very successful Welcome & Transition programme with many events such as the Boat Ball and Afterparty. Student Societies have flourished with many new Societies being set up. All these developments have contributed to a significant increase in student engagement.
- JT showed that new staff posts of Operations and Project Manager and the new Sports post had been added to the forecast which show an unfavourable variance of £23,000.
- The Board previously approved a £50,000 spend from reserves for Sport of which £35,000 expenditure for this is demonstrated in these accounts. This leaves £15,000 remaining to be spent on Sport.
- JT said slight savings had been made from the Deputy CEO being on maternity and delayed appointments.
- JT said the block grant for this year had increased by 33% which included a 22% increase in staff costs due to annual increments and new posts created part way through the budgeting year.
- JT noted the income is showing more favourable than in the forecast due to underbudgeted bank interest which is higher than expected when originally budgeted for.
- JT explained that in the block grant, the Sports budget is ring fenced to only be spent on Sport which is used on membership cards, kit, equipment, subscriptions, coaches, and referees. Originally Sport was projected to make a £19,000 surplus but is now predicted to end in a deficit.
- JT pointed out the current organisation forecast is the Union will finish with a £50,199 deficit. JT said this could be mitigated by taking on some staff in future as part time and can start to focus on savings that could be made.

The Board commented with the following points:

- The Board noted that ending in a deficit may be favourable.
- PG noted that it was interesting that the Auditors believe that the Union's reserves are on the lighter side as the University view the Union's reserves as high.
- The Board enquired about retail income and if the Union was being peso-realistic with this amount. JT confirmed this has been considered due to a decrease in sales in pop up shops, and this had been decreased to reach the original target set.
- JT confirmed that the Union would undergo a reforecast exercise again in February 2024.
- PG highlighted the Finance team currently operates at 1.2 FTE which is a risk area in how the finances of the Union are supported and how the Union remains student focussed. Considering this, the Union has been processing student claims in a week and the Finance Coordinator has been temporarily increased to 0.8 FTE but is not currently sustainable according to the budget. PG added this would be a key area to grow in the future, particularly if the Union merges with St. Georges.

The Board **noted** the Management Accounts and thanked JT.

Section E - Starred items for approval

- 17. Deputy Returning Officer Appointment** (Paper: BT2336)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **approved** by the Board.
- 18. Sabbatical Officer Salary** (Paper: BT2337)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **approved** by the Board.
- 19. Data Protection Policy** (Paper: BT2338)

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

- 20. Equality and Diversity Policy** (Paper: BT2339)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **approved** by the Board.

- 21. H&S Policy** (Paper: BT2340)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **approved** by the Board.

- 22. Union Advice Service Policy Handbook 2023/24 Updates** (Paper: BT2341)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **approved** by the Board.

Section F - Starred items for information

- 23. Summary of all Assembly meetings since the last meeting of the BoT** (Paper: BT2342)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

- 24. H&S Report** (Paper: BT2343)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

- 25. Advice Annual Report** (Paper: BT2344)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

- 26. Welcome 2023 Evaluation** (Paper: BT2345)
This item remained starred so was not discussed and was **noted** by the Board.

Section G - Other

27. Any Other Business

PG noted the next meeting date would clash with the upcoming Elections therefore PG suggested the next Board meeting be held on either the 5 or 12 of March 2024. The Board decided to **agree** the next meeting date via a poll to be sent via correspondence from PG and respond to PG by Monday 18 December.

The Board thanked LW for their contribution to the Union as a Trustee and wished them all the best in the future.

Date of the next meeting: 5 March 2024
Board Clerk: Aadam Ali