

Minutes

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11 March 2025 | AG01, College Building, Clerkenwell Campus

Members	Initials	Meet-ing 1 17.09.24	Meeting 2 10.12.24	Meeting 3 11.03.25	Meeting 4 03.06.25	Meeting 5 22.07.25
Ayla Hamzayeva (President) (Chair)	AH	✓	✓	✓		
Nasir Mohammed (Deputy President)	NM	✓	✓	A		
Ashton Shepherd (Deputy President)	AS	✓	✓	✓		
Joseph Kenwright (Deputy President)	JK	✓	✓	✓		
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓	✓	✓		
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	AL	✓	A	✓		
Jas Ahluwalia (Lay Trustee)	JA	✓	✓	✓		
Rachel Brown (Lay Trustee)	RB	✓	✓	✓		
Leila Ratnani (Lay Trustee)	LR	✓	A	A		
Jeffrey Wiltshire (Lay Trustee)	JW	A	✓	A		
Eva O'Neill (Student Trustee)	EO	A	X	X		
Prachi Barache (Student Trustee)	PB	✓	NM	NM		
Dorottya Fricska (Student Trustee)	DF	NM	✓	✓		

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

Included in the circulation / In attendance	Initials	Reason and Meeting Section
Eve Harwood	EH	Sabbatical Officer (Deputy President)
Philip Gilks	PG	Chief Executive (Company Secretary)
Hannah Roberts	HR	Deputy Chief Executive
Jeni Turner	JT	Head of Finance
Kany Lee	KL	Operations and Projects Manager
Kathy Kingwill	KK	Clerk
Ryan Ginger	RG	Head of Communities (for informal section)
Julie Hagger	JH	Sports Coordinator (for informal section)

Informal

Julie Hagger, Sports Coordinator (JH) and Ryan Ginger, Head of Communities (RG) attended for this item.

For the informal section of the meeting the Board received a presentation, from Julie Hagger (JH) and Ryan Ginger (RG), of the tender process and potential Sports Kit samples from the preferred supplier to be agreed by the Board. [See item 11]

The Board thanked JH and RG for the presentation, bringing along the samples, and for all their work on the tender.

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair (AH) noted apologies from Nasir Mohammed (NM), Leila Ratnani (LR), and Jeffrey Wiltshire (JW).

2. Declarations of Interest

(Paper: BT2436)

The Board noted the Conflicts of Interest Register updated on 27 February 2025.

3. Minutes and Actions

3.1 The Board approved the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024

(Paper: BT2437M)

3.2 The Board noted the Matters Arising (Paper: BT2438A), noting the following:

- Action 9. Update to the *Union Advice Service Policy Handbook*: Some progress has been made as the new Advice and support Manager, Abbey Clifton, is now in post.

4. Decisions taken between meetings

There were no decisions taken between meetings.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

The Chair had no items to bring forward.

Section A – Update from the Chief Executive and Strategic Progress

6. Chief Executive Report

(Paper: BT2439)

Phil Gilks (PG) provided an update on activities since the last meeting. He highlighted staffing, leadership team, NUS survey, performance indicators, advice and support, communities and sports, voice and insight, Tooting facilities, and communications.

The team were still very busy following the merger, but it was expected that this would ease in time. Staff shortages continued to be challenging. The most notable departure was the Chief Operating Officer, Tooting, who left the Union in January. Most of the tasks allocated to this role were being covered by PG, JT and HR, so the role would not be replaced, although this did leave a gap in commercial leadership. Some good appointments had been made to other vacant roles. The revised staff structure meant that staff were working more closely across sites which was helpful for integration, and there was a good positive attitude in the team. Some thought needed to be given to reporting lines, however, as PG and HR now had a lot of direct reports and PG highlighted the work done by KL on the performance management process, to better explain the Union's values.

The Union space in Tooting had undergone some refurbishment and was now looking much brighter with rebranding in place.

There were continuing concerns expressed by some students and the Union's Jewish Societies following the publication of the statement discussed at the last meeting [paper BT2435]. One Assembly member had resigned. The Jewish Society, Tooting Campus, was trying to disaffiliate from the Union, so discussions were underway to broker a better relationship. There was no process for disaffiliation in the Articles of Association and Bye-laws, and this would be the first time a society did so, but it was hoped that the situation could be resolved.

Now that the Advice and Support Manager was in post it was hoped that the case backlog would reduce. The team would also be looking at a different approach to the Advice Service to empower students more; this could allow more time for those who were really in need.

In discussion the following points were noted:

- Other Students' Union were also experiencing heightened tensions due to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.
- Efforts were being made to avert disaffiliation of the Jewish Society, Tooting, but the situation was challenging as it appeared that the Society did not wish to engage with the University or the Union.
- The election of new Sabbatical Officers who were distanced from the statement might bring the opportunity to build bridges.
- Although the departure of the COO, Tooting, was creating some extra workload for the Senior Team, there was a strong argument not to replace the post as the Union's commercial activities did not justify the cost of a dedicated senior manager. There was potential to grow the commercial side in future which could mean that this decision was revisited, but it was more pressing for the Union to plug staff shortages at lower grades.

The Board thanked PG and colleagues for the update.

7. Strategy Update Report (Paper: BT2440)

The Board noted an update report on the implementation of the Strategy. Four more strategic projects had been delivered; launch of the new Union space, changes to the Complaints and Disciplinary Bye-law, building relationships with Union staff in Tooting, and delivering the Union Skills Development Programme. The timelines for others had been reviewed as staff shortages and dependencies on university units had caused some delays in completion. Next steps were to consider what to carry forward to the next academic year and what to close out; this would be a topic for the Board Away Day in July. **[Action]**

8. Merger Update (Paper: BT2441)

The Board received an update on the merger, overseen by the Merger Board with task and finish groups. Work was in progress to; remove SGSU from the Register of Charities with the help of legal advisors, continue to integrate finance processes, unify the governance process, practices and guidance for sports, along with work on communities and events, Advice, Freedom of Speech policy, and safeguarding. It was also proposed that the Board should now agree to release £50k, of the £100k designated as part of the Transfer Agreement as 'Restricted Funds' for Tooting, to facilitate the purchase of a new minibus for Tooting and to invest in furniture and storage for Union spaces on the Tooting campus, namely the games room and the bar. In discussion the following points were made:

- PG noted that the work on the merger was going well and thanked the team for their efforts.
- There was a degree of emotion around the unification of sports governance and, as the Union delivered sports on behalf of the University, discussions were ongoing with the University executive.
- There were some alumni funds for investment into the Tooting campus but it would be helpful to have more.
- The space was shared by the University but was used by students so the Union wished to fund the upgrade.
- AL and JA asked about commercial arrangements regarding the shared space and whether this warranted a commercial lead, perhaps in the form of a short term consultant. This could be considered once there was more clarification of finances at Tooting. **[Action]**

Decisions

The Board **approved** the release of up to £50k from funds reserved for Tooting campus to invest in a new minibus and for the refurbishment of facilities in Tooting.

9. Term 1 Student Gateway Review

(Paper: BT2442)

The Board received the Term 1 review of the new service model in the Union following the move to be adjacent to the Student Hub in Drysdale Building. The review had been conducted via service usage analysis and collection of staff feedback and was carried out alongside a review of the Student Support Hub Service. Outcomes indicated that Welcome Desk usage was in-line with that of the Hub, with Thursdays being the busiest day. The Union handled half the total enquiries. Areas for improvement were better data capture and online booking systems as well as recording office pod usage and hourly enquiries to optimise staff support hours. It was hoped to make use of SUMS for room bookings. In discussion the following points were noted:

- The location of the Welcome Desk had led to a huge increase in enquiries which was really positive.
- JA asked if there was an efficiency gain by using a chatbot to provide information and to redirect some of the simpler queries. HR and PG noted that this was something that the Union could consider as part of the website project as this would free up staff time to support more complex queries. The University was evaluating Copilot so the Union was awaiting the outcome of this. The Hub did have a chat function but their desk was quieter than the Union's.

10. SUMS: Website and Membership Management

(Paper: BT2443)

The Board considered an update on the implementation of the new website services provider, following the appointment of SUMS (Students' Union Management System Ltd) to provide website and membership management. The contract period would commence in May 25 and the intention was to launch the new website in August. The Data Protection Impact Assessment and Data Sharing Review was in progress with a project group established. There would be integration between Iplc and SUMS to enable online purchasing, with a testing and training phase to commence in May.

The following discussion took place at the start of the meeting but formal decisions are reported here. Julie Hagger, Sports Coordinator (JH) and Ryan Ginger, Head of Communities (RG) attended for this item.

11. Kit Tender

The Trustee Board was asked to approve the recommendation for preferred sports kit supplier now as there was a six month lead in for stock, with an intended launch for the start of the next academic year. The contract would be for three years. 10 suppliers had been asked to tender, with 4 suppliers submitting tenders, including the existing supplier, Akuma. Staff and student panels had assessed the tenders at a presentation on 3 March, and had proposed that Surridge should be recommended to the Board for appointment. Next steps would be to involve students in the design process for each sports club. The Team were looking forward to seeing the new branding on the sports kits. In discussion the following points were made:

- RG explained that Surridge was able to work to a faster turnaround time which was a major factor in the decision process, along with the projected costs of the contract's duration.
- The availability of inclusive sportswear, such as sports hijabs and differing leg lengths, was an important consideration for the Tender Panel.
- The decision between the shortlisted suppliers had been close. The existing supplier, Akuma, had been City's supplier for eight years, but the tender submitted was more expensive, including the costs of individual purchase by students, and did not offer consultation with students on the design process.

- There was no break clause in the contract but there was provision for clubs to go elsewhere if kit was too technical.
- The tender process had included a financial assessment of the suppliers.
- The contract was for three years but it was hoped that it would be extended for further cycles as this was more cost effective.
- The Union would be purchasing stock kit for three years.
- PG would be negotiating with the University to cover the total cost of rebranded sports kits for all teams; currently £35k had been provided, but there was a shortfall of up to £45 as there were now more sports teams, so the Board was asked to release funds to cover this initially.
- The team would look at the contract to check protection against unduly high price increases in-contract. **[Action]**

Decision

The Trustee Board **approved** the appointment of the preferred supplier, Surridge, to provide sports kit for the Union's sports teams, and **agreed** expenditure of up to £45k if required to cover a potential shortfall in funding from the University.

Section B – Finance

12. Management Accounts – January 2025 (Q2) (Presentation: BT2445)

The Board received the January (Q2) Management Accounts. JT highlighted that since the last meeting further progress had been made to fully merge the finance team which was now centrally managed. Progress was also being made to align policies and procedures. Reviews were underway of the shop and bar finance operations and risks identified; there were challenges as there were two finance systems which would take time to merge to achieve a common culture. The SGSU Statutory Accounts had now been received with the management report; this indicated areas for improvement with stock taking and invoice approval, so controls would be put in place to address gaps. The I&E summary showed a variance of £43k, £41k of this was in Trading Company. As noted previously the variance in Charity I&E was due to the decrease in Block Grant due to the lower salary increment and decrease in sports membership income; this was offset in part by staff vacancies and other savings were found in travel and subsistence. The Trading Company was currently showing a loss of £9k, this was due to lower bar sales as there was a small profit shown by the shop, however it had not been possible to make an adjustment for stock as no data was available, so this figure might improve. In discussion the following points were made:

- The bar sales were showing a downward trend over the past two years; this reflected a general trend in the sector.
- This was also below budget sales from vending machines in the bar area, as these were included in the bar income. JT had introduced budget categories to separate income streams to address this, as noted in the Risk Log for Tooting [paper: BT2446].
- There were also delays in posting income, which was skewing results. The credit card data was also issued three months behind so the Team would investigate the service from the credit card supplier to request more frequent updates.
- JA noted that the Trading Board had discussed whether the shop and bar were keeping up with customer habits.
- There was currently no process for monthly end closures in the shop or bar, as previously Tooting only provided quarterly accounts; this was a risk and therefore under review but it would take time to sort out.
- The staff were very keen to move forward to be more efficient so changes to systems were being well received and the team had caught up considerably; there was now access to systems and live invoicing from the NUS, and timelines were included in the Risk Log to monitor resolution of issues.
- The trading performance was only showing £20k profit so this needed to be factored into management time invested.

- An additional Risk had been identified this week. Tooting Society balances were not separated into Restricted Reserves but had been included in General Reserves. Some funds appeared to have been brought forward from last year but it was currently unclear where these were located in the accounts. The auditors had left some balances without comment.
- The Union had been informed initially that there were no balances, so JT and colleagues had asked for evidence and investigations were underway to verify if these were student monies. The potential total was £60k, which, if balances were found to be genuine, would have to be moved into Restricted Reserves.
- The investigation was at an early stage. Some societies could have closed and the team were also looking at opening balances; some balances would be difficult to verify.

The Board noted the report and thanked JT and the team for all their efforts to date.

13. Tooting Commercial Finance Risk Log (Paper: BT2446)

The Board noted the risks and mitigations identified to address challenges relating to finance from the Legacy St George's Students' Union. JT highlighted in particular: the risk around non-alcohol bar sales as this was subject to a yearly agreement with the University, currently under discussion; should the agreement be terminated this would mean a loss of income of circa £44k pa; that general bar sales were trending downwards, although staff costs were fixed; there were challenges in data collection for monthly management reporting as previously reports had been quarterly.

- The Risk Log would go to the Trading Board meeting on 10 April for consideration.
- Further consideration was needed of what the Union wished to provide in the bar and what students wanted from the facility.
- It was hoped that a suitable period of notice would be given should the University withdraw its agreement regarding the vending machines and other non-alcohol sales in the bar. It would also be useful to have agreement with the University on space usage so there was clarity.
- Other universities were moving to Memorandum of Agreements with unions; the Union did not have one with the University but the relationship was excellent so the Union was in a strong position to negotiate.
- There is also a potentially need to ensure that there is a lease in place for the Union spaces operated in Tooting with the university.
- The Board thanked JT and the Finance Team for all their hard work.

14. Auditor Appointment Timeline

The Board noted the approach and timeline for the appointment of External Auditors to the Union. Both current auditors would be asked to tender, and the Union would also approach Auditors with experience of students' unions so that there was a range of tender to consider.

Section C – Student Insight

15. Sabbatical Officer Spotlight (Paper: BT2448)

Sabbatical Officers provided brief updates on their activities, as follows:

- Ayla had organised a 'Galentines' event in February to promote friendship and cross community engagement.
- Ashton and Eve had been working on EDI initiatives for LGBTQ+ History month and Black Lives Matter.
- The Officers had been working with the University on a Festival of the Professions which would focus on careers, placements and internships.
- Ashton had worked on Finance February with a series of events to look at personal finance; he reported that 60% of students reported cost of living concerns.
- Nasir was working on Ramadan events with Iftar on campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

- Eve reported that the Rob Lowe space in Tooting was now fully open and being used every day. The Union would now be requesting reimbursement of the cost of external venue hire during refurbishment.
- Forthcoming events would be women's history month and a boat naming ceremony with Lord (Patrick) Vallance.
- There were ongoing discussions with Officers, the University SLT and the GMC regarding degree certificates to be awarded to legacy St George's students.

The Board thanked the Sabbatical Officers for their update.

16. Pulse Survey Report (Paper: BT2449)

The Board noted the Report. There had been 816 responses with 78% satisfied overall. There was some confusion around University versus Union provision and the survey was difficult to track against the NSS but it did provide some indication of possible outcomes.

Section D – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

17. Student EDI Network Update

The Board received a verbal update on the work of the Student EDI Network. The group had met once, with good discussion of issues such as representation, and the possible introduction of women's and LGBTQ+ officers.

18. OfS New Condition on Harassment & Sexual Misconduct and the Preventing Sexual Harassment at Work Legal Duty (Paper: BT2450)

The Board received an update on the OfS New Condition on Harassment and Sexual Misconduct and the Preventing Sexual Harassment at Work Legal Duty, which will come into effect in August 2025, although the legal duty came into effect in October 2024. PG highlighted the measures required, including training for both staff and students which would be online via an external provider for most students but in person for Tooting. Many actions were in place already as the University was the joint employer for staff in the Union. PG was co-chair of the Staff Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Committee, and the new Advice and Support Manager, Abbey Clifton had experience in this area which was helpful.

Section E - Starred items for approval

(Starred items for approval. Not discussed unless unstarred by a Board member)

19. *Finance Regulations (Paper: BT2451)

Section F - Starred items for Information

(Starred items for information. Not discussed unless unstarred by a Board member)

***Summary of all Assembly meetings since the last meeting of the Board of Trustees** (Paper: BT2452)

20. *Term 1 Advice and Support Service Report (Paper: BT2453)

Section G - Other

21. Any Other Business

PG and HR noted that the Elections were running until Thursday 13 March; there was a good candidate field and 3,391 votes had been registered to date which was excellent. The Academic Impact Award nominations were also underway with increased engagement which was also positive. *[Note: the outcome of the elections was circulated to Trustee Board members on 13 March].*

Date of next meeting: 3 June 2025