

Minutes

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21 May 2024 | St George's University Campus, Tooting

Members	Initials	Meeting 1 13.09.23	Meeting 2 06.12.23	Meeting 3 16.02.24	Meeting 4 05.03.24	Meeting 5 23.05.24	Meeting 6 15.07.24
Akanksha Kumar (President) (Chair)	AK	✓	A	✓	✓	✓	
Fortune Sampson (Deputy President)	FS	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	
Yavuz Emin Kafadar (Deputy President)	YK	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Jackson HE (Deputy President)	JH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ashton Shepherd (Deputy President-Elect)	AS	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	✓/ N/M	
Nick Ratcliffe (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair)	NR	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Alan Latham (Lay Trustee)	EP	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Liz Williams (Lay Trustee)	LW	✓	✓	N/M	N/M	N/M	
Jas Ahluwalia (Lay Trustee)	JA	N/M	A	✓	✓	✓	
Rachel Brown (Lay Trustee)	RB	N/M	✓	X	P	✓	
Leila Ratnani (Lay Trustee)	LR	N/M	✓/ N/M	✓	A	✓	
Saundarya Rastogi (Student Trustee)	SR	✓	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	
Eva O'Neill (Student Trustee)	EO	N/M	✓	X	A	✓	
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)
Hannah Roberts	HR	Deputy Chief Executive
Jeni Turner	JT	Head of Finance
Chris Moore	CM	Head of Communications and Business Development
Aadam Ali	AA	Clerk

Formal

1. Welcome and Apologies

AK welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked all Trustees and Staff for their contribution to the Board over the past year.

2. Declarations of Interest

(Paper: BT2364)

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

3. Minutes

3.1 The Board **approved** the Minutes of the meeting held on the 05 March 2024 as being a true and accurate record.

(Paper: BT2365M)

3.2 The Board **noted** the Matters Arising (Paper: BT2366A), noting the following:

- The Senate Student Members Appointment action is yet to be completed and the deadline for has been extended to July 2024. The ordinance related to Senate has been updated but the action is not able to progress until the composition is confirmed.
- The St Georges Merger action (following the Board's approval of the proposal including the amended Articles of Association, the Board's approval of the referendum question and call to referendum) is complete and has been included in the agenda.
- The St Georges Merger action (following the Board agreeing to have two members to sit on the merged Subsidiary Board following the merger, which will be captured in the transfer agreement) is ongoing and should be complete by September 2024. St George's Students' Union have been informed, the lawyers have been referenced in the transfer agreement and the Board needs to nominate which members will sit on the Subsidiary Board.
- The St Georges Merger action (following the decision for NR to sit on the People Work Subgroup and Workstream) is ongoing and Nick has notified the Board of progress and has asked for feedback.

4. Decisions taken between the meetings

There were no decisions taken by the Board of Trustees between meetings.

5. Items brought forward by the Chair

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

Section A – Update from the Chief Executive and Strategic Progress

6. Chief Executive Report

(Paper: BT2367)

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 updated the Board on recruitment and staffing and noted the appointment of a new Representation and Democracy Coordinator and that their induction was going well. PG also updated that the Democratic Communities Coordinator was leaving and that the Union is currently recruiting for their replacement.
- PG highlighted that the Union have made a report to the Charity Commission regarding a reportable incident and said that he would update the Board when he had heard back from the Commission.
- PG updated that HR is leading on the Officer Induction which will be cross campus with St George's who are happy to be incorporated into the Union's existing training framework. PG noted that one of the Officers is on leave for six-weeks from the start of the induction period, and they will be inducted when they return.
- PG noted that he had secured some in-year funding for Student Groups following the bid submitted to the Finance Board, and funding for the additional work from the Finance Team.

- PG reported the Union Awards which took place on the 9th May were a success with almost 200 attendees and PG hoped all Trustees that attended enjoyed them. PG also said that the Academic Impact Awards were also a success.

As part of his report, PG discussed the NUS Staff Engagement Survey Results highlighting the following:

- PG reported on the NUS Employee Engagement Survey results in which the Union did not see a noticeable reduction in staff engagement. PG added that the results were disappointing but expected due to the year that the Union has had including the merger with St George's, the offices moving to the Student Gateway, the acquisition of Sport and other external factors. PG added that the SLT is committed to taking away actions from the survey to develop a plan to improve highlighted areas.
- PG felt that the biggest issue highlighted in the Survey was the lack of leadership in the Union over the past year, but now the Union is back at full strength. PG said that this was achieved after the survey took place. Overall looking at the headline categories, the Union scored mostly green or blue which denotes more than 50% respondents are positive or less than 20% results were overall negative. One area, Employee Wellbeing was orange which denotes less than 50% of respondents were positive and 20%-30% respondents were overall negative.
- PG suggested that on the results of Employee Wellbeing, staff were overall happy and invested in the new performance management system, but staff felt that they were not a priority. Following the Survey, the Union will be holding a wellbeing lunch on Tuesdays which would be accessible for all staff, and that all staff would have a wellbeing hour in which they could use an agreed hour a month to do something related to their wellbeing.
- PG added that there would be more support for staff to manage and recognise their workloads through setting expectations, and introducing a gold, silver and bronze system of priority which would denote major Union-wide projects, key Union activity once a month and important departmental projects. PG also highlighted that staff would have a clear approach to project management to enable staff to have a greater sense of control of their projects and workload. Lastly, PG said there would be a review of hybrid working following the move to the Student Gateway.
- On Communication, PG said that there would be a review of the existing Staff Handbook and transitioning content onto SharePoint, and once every six months, staff would have a SKIP meeting which is a meeting their manager's manager to improve communication and allow for more feedback.
- PG stated that there would be a complete review of EDI within the organisation, ensuring a voice for staff, students, and Officers with clear lines of accountability. The Board commented that technology could be used to ensure this takes place efficiently.
Action: KL to speak with JA to evaluate the use of Microsoft Copilot for the Union to use going forward.

The Board thanked PG and **noted** the Chief Executive report.

7. Strategy Update Report

(Paper: BT2368)

PG presented the Strategy Update Report and highlighted the following for Trustees:

- PG said that with the changing strategy, the Union is now able to view a snapshot of the different projects the Union is committing to, who the project sponsor for each project would be, and the progress of each project.
- PG suggested that this would support the focus on workload planning and to review work that is realistic in line with the Union's priorities.
- PG noted that the Union would be using SharePoint to host the Strategy Update Report which would be live and viewable by Trustees. PG added that this would improve

accountability with Trustees and projects would be visible to see including progress and completion status.

- PG noted that there are numerous projects remaining on the report however this was due to the high workload with the St George's merger which has impacted on staff time and capacity. PG said that over the next few months, the Union would review its priorities **Action:** Trustees to receive the Union's priorities as part of the Strategy Update Report for approval by September 2024.
- PG presented the Communications Plan for Trustees to comment on before it would be adopted.

The Board thanked PG and made the following comments around the Communications Plan:

- The Board questioned the concern around student emails and enquired about the level of text-heavy messaging and whether emails were branded. CM explained that emails were branded and that the Union uses mailchimp partially to send emails to students through the CMS which are streamlined.
- CM highlighted that the main issue is students likely are not engaging with the Union's emails because of the volume of emails students receive from City which could be between 20-25 emails a day, and that students associate the Union's emails with City.
- CM highlighted that another challenge with emails is that the Union's emails are going into the 'other' mailbox, because the email system currently recognises the Union's emails as being external to City. CM has requested that City whitelists the Union's emails to ensure they go into the main inbox of students.
- The Board commented that students do not feel comfortable using mediums such as Instagram to communicate regarding their student life due to the crossover with their personal life, but they recommended LinkedIn could be an option for students to use. CM agreed and noted that although LinkedIn is viewed as quite professional, it could be an option to elevate content for students.
- CM highlighted the challenge with decisions around priority and emails, as every sender will tend to view their content as being a priority, however CM suggested that there should be a clear policy in place to help identify email priority.
- The Board suggested that although email is a powerful tool, with the number of messages being sent via email, SharePoint and other mediums of mass communication would bring the challenge for students to discern what is noise and what is relevant. CM added that students desire a personalised and segmented service with curated content for them on a homepage, much like some companies do such as ASOS.

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

8. St George's Merger

(Paper: BT2369)

PG presented the St George's Merger update to the Board which was presented and discussed in a closed section which was not minuted.

The Board thanked PG and made the following decisions:

- The Board **noted** the update on the merger with St George's Students' Union and the work carried out via the Students' Union Merger Board and Subgroups.
- The Board **commented** and gave feedback on the draft Transfer Agreement.
- The Board **approved** the revised Bye-Laws to take effect from 1 August 2024.
- The Board **noted** the progress made towards the merger of BUCS sport.
- The Board **noted** the agreed recommendation paper for the Union to adopt Iplc as the new accounting software package.
- The Board **noted** the progress relating to HR matters.

- The Board **noted** the progress made towards the development of a revised logo and brand.

Section B - Student Insight

9. Sabb Spotlight

(Paper: BT2370)

AK presented on their progress as President and highlighted the following points:

- AK said that following funding provided by City of £20,000, the Union will be trialling nap pods on campus, and AK is working with the Estates team to find suitable locations for them to be housed.
- AK has been working to give input on the City Strategy for international students recruitment, in what is a challenging area and time for Universities.
- AK has been working on Mental Health Awareness Week and that it was a key priority for them. AK noted the Union would be delivering several activities and events for this including free brunches and puppies on campus.
- AK noted that the Union collaborated with an external company who specialise in South Asian events, to deliver the Holi Celebration on campus which was successful seeing 450 students attending.

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

- FS noted that after lobbying City, a fee instalments system for international students will be rolled out for students are struggling with fee payments who can in instalments of six or more on request.
- FS said that the Union would be providing Black Heritage Lanyards in addition to the LGBTQ+ and Invisible Disability lanyards provided by the Union.
- FS said that students benefitted from employability skills programmes in addition to support on making professional LinkedIn profiles and a review of resits paper has been submitted to Senate which proposes changes for students to graduate alongside their peers with catered for support following failing an assessment.
- FS said that City Marketing and Alumni have committed to funding the City Side Hustlers Extravaganza for students who have businesses or work they do for themselves through a programme called the Side Hustlers Extravaganza to help students in the cost of living crisis.

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

- YK said they have continued working with Buzzbike to try and expand the scheme to students around London and he is waiting for the City President to contact other Vice Chancellors on the scheme. YK said that the totals users of Buzzbikes at City was 31 with 150 users arounds London which is a big contribution from City, and YK would like the scheme to grow.
- YK has lobbied for a discount for students for lunch prices to be priced from £6.50 to £4.90 which was not successful, therefore YK will be organising a boycott on campus of catering which he will hand over to the new Officer Team.
- YK has received approval from the Estates team for the bidet project which went through the EDI Committee and will now be received at the Finance Board for funding. Currently the price for 30 bidet facilities is £180,000.00 but YK is looking at cheaper alternatives. YK highlighted that students who will use the bidets will benefit from them due to religious requirements.
- YK is reviewing the clubs and societies processes and how to improve them. YK will revisit clubs and societies rules as they had received complaints about inactive societies from students.

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

- JH said that they oversaw the VR Wellbeing Fair which was a collaboration between various stakeholders including St George's. The fair provided a good opportunity for students to relax and have a stress free experience through the headsets and this received positive feedback which could be continued for exam periods going forward.
- JH noted that the bursary project survey received over 300 responses on accessing bursaries with mixed feedback but more negative. The changes will be collated and presented to the City Finance Team.
- JH said the student handbook they have been working on is progressing and it would include more visuals and would open as a foldable booklet, ready for the new academic year.
- JH said that the Muslim Fund project would initiate this month with plans to exhaust the £10,000 grant by the end of July 2024.

The Board made the following comments:

- The Board enquired about catering. PG clarified that the catering provision was tendered for with Graysons selected by the previous Director of Estates. The Board suggested that there should be harmony between the City and St. George's campus on catering provision.
- The Board commented on the use of the term BAME and noted its use in the reports but suggested that it is now out of date with other ways to describe ethnicities for audience insight.
- The Board commented on the student handbook and asked if it would be possible to use digital methods for students to receive this due to sustainability concerns. JH said they felt students wanted a physical copy when they start University.

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

Section C – Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

10. EDI Report

(Paper: BT2371)

HR presented the EDI Report and highlighted the following for Trustees:

- HR said every year, the Union does an Equality Impact Report. HR said the report gives the highlights as part of the annual report.
- HR noted the Committee decided that the four priorities this year were student safety, an accessible student gateway, inclusivity calendar intersectionality and training and development.
- HR has worked with each of the EDI Chairs on how the Union delivers EDI both separately and together.
- HR said she understood the Board's earlier point regarding the use of BAME, and that there are better and more descriptive terms to describe the student population.
- HR noted that there is currently a good representation of students in the Assembly despite there not being dedicated positions e.g. LGBTQ+ Officer.
- HR explained that the Union proportionately elects students from schools, and that the Assembly Members represent City students well. PG added that the Union works with each dedicated area e.g. the LGBTQ+ Society, Islamic Society or the Afro-Caribbean Society.
- The Board asked what would happen if those elected in the Assembly did not accurately represent City Students. HR clarified that there is provision on the Bye-Laws for the Union to appoint more members, and to utilise demographic reports and targeted promotion in elections. PG added that the Assembly does appoint persons with lived experience from different groups from the wider Assembly in roles.

The Board **noted** the EDI report.

Section D – Finance

11. Management Accounts

(Paper: BT2372)

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

- JT said following the Board's approval to use the Ipllicit software as the new accounting package, JT said meetings would be held with St. George's from the 3rd June to look at integration.
- JT added that a comprehensive list of tasks along with a timeline had been drawn up for the merger and that next steps would be to set up bank and credit cards and ensuring VAT is set up in the most advantageous manner as this could be set up for a group or individually.
- JT noted that the Union's VAT review had been completed whilst the VAT review from St. George's was pending. JT explained this would tie into the balance and reconciliation in the merger accounting and ascertaining liability as part of a due diligence exercise.
- JT confirmed that the reforecast exercise had been completed in March 2024, and JT had sat with managers to discuss likely spending in their budgets for the remainder of the year which would realign funds.
- JT reported that for the nine months to the 30 April 2024, on income the Union received £20,000 for underbudgeted interest, time differences for advertising has yielded £7,000 in variance. JT added savings had been made with staff costs due to vacant posts amounting to £11,000, however there had been an overspend with temporary staff costs to £3000 and the salary uplift was offset by pension savings.
- JT said that there was a net company surplus of £362,350 which is £9,000 lower than budgeted. Smaller net underspends make up the balance. JT added that the current full year forecast deficit is £63,406 due to governance costs, sports kits from reserves and spending on temporary staff, against a budgeted surplus of £19,187.
- JT highlighted the movement between the budget and forecast amounted to £82,593, £35,000 which relates to agreed sports spending from reserves which leaves a forecast overspend of £66,780. Of this figure, JT said £56,152 relates to unbudgeted costs of a new post and overspend in temporary staff, and £15,000 related to unbudgeted costs for Trustee recruitment. Lastly, £30,000 related to unbudgeted bank interest receivable estimated on current rates.
- The Board asked about the management accounts at St. George's currently. JT noted that St. George's have quarterly accounts and said that these would be used as part of the due diligence exercise.

The Board **noted** the Management Accounts.

12. Budget Timeline

(Paper: BT2373)

JT presented the Budget Timeline highlighting the following points:

- JT noted that the budget would be constructed using a zero-budgeting method and not looking backwards at last year's budgets.
- JT added that budgets would be formed by Senior Managers using a clear rationale and how it would link to the strategy.
- JT said that the budgeting process will include a review of this year's block grant and it is estimated that the current year block grant may increase by £20,000-£40,000. This will partly offset the deficit highlighted in the management accounts.

The Board **noted** the Budget Timeline.

Section E - Starred items for approval

There were no items submitted in this section at this meeting.

Section F - Starred items for information

13. Summary of all Assembly meetings since the last meeting of the BoT

(Paper: BT2374)

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

14. Election Returning Officer Report

(Paper: BT2375)

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

15. Referendum Returning Officer Report

(Paper: BT2376)

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

Section G – Other

16. 2024/25 Calendar of Business and meeting Dates

(Paper: BT2377)

PG presented the proposed Board Calendar of Business and meeting dates for the year and noted the following:

- PG highlighted that the dates were created with the merger and the Trading Company Subsidiary Board in mind.
- PG stated that the Union is looking to move to meetings in person with most of them being held at City and one to take place at St. George's.
- PG added that the Board should decide on the rescheduled July 2024 meeting and away day. PG highlighted that the Board must meet as Company Law Members to approve the Articles. PG also said additionally, the Board needs to approve the additional policies and the budget. PG suggested the Board should hold a short meeting online in these two parts on the 15 July 2024 and that he would suggest alternative dates for the Board Away Day in August or September.

The Board **approved** the Calendar of Business and meeting dates. The Board **agreed** for the Company Law Members Meeting and short Board of Trustees meeting to take place on the 15 July 2024.

17. Any Other Business

The following business was raised by Trustees:

- FS noted that the Senate composition action is still pending, he thought the zero-budgeting method should be used in conjunction with independent members of events to secure funding for these events and lastly, he felt the Union was not independent and suggested the Board should consider how to operate effectively with less reliance City.
- AK thanked all Trustees for their contribution over the past year and wished those leaving the Board all the best.

AK thanked all Trustees, the staff and the Clerk and closed the meeting.

Date of the next meeting: 4.30pm, Tues 21 May 2024

Board Clerk: Adam Ali