

**Trustee Board Summary Minutes**

Held on Thursday 28th November 2024 at 4.00 p.m. – Belfast: BA\_02\_012, Coleraine: H113A, and Magee: MD008A

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| **Present:**   | **In Attendance:** |
| Ethan Davies, President (Chair)  Reece Armstrong, Vice President Magee (RA) Christopher Murray, Vice President Coleraine (CM) Eoin Millar, Student Trustee (EM) Ashley Neill, Lay Trustee (AN) Andrea Probets, Lay Trustee (AP) Darren Fowler, Lay Trustee (DF) Cohen Taylor, Student Trustee (CT)   | David Longstaff, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)Clodagh Kennedy, Director of Finance & Business Support (CK)Colin Campbell, Director of HR & Campus Operations (CC)Favour Okpohs, Vice President Belfast (FO)Daniel Sanusi, Vice President Equality and Belonging (DS)Conor O’Hagan, Vice President Sport and Wellbeing (CH) |
| **Apologies:**  |   |
| Emily Roberts, Vice President, Education (ER) Antoinette Bradley, Lay Trustee (AB) William Atkinson, Lay Trustee (WA) |  |

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| **Meeting notes** | **Action**  | **Update** |
| **Agenda Item 1: Welcome by Chair**  The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 2: Presentation of the Audited Accounts 2023-24 from GMcG Auditors** CK thanked the Chair and introduced NM (Partner at GMcG). NM gave a brief overview of the statutory financial statements, and his role as an external auditor. He referred to his report and directed the group to page 8 and the section detailed “Opinion”. NM noted that there was nothing strange or unusual that he needed to flag to the group. He gave a brief overview of the figures in the accounts and referred to page 14 of his report (section detailed Statement of Financial Activities). The following is of note:**Total Income:**Income is just under £3 million, whereas last year it was just over £2.5 million. The income is higher this year as more income was generated for the clubs and societies. **Expenditure:**Total expenditure is under £3million, which is up from last years’ expenditure figure at £2.44 million. The main reason for the increase is due to more activity within the clubs and societies.**Pension costs:**NM referred to the exceptional pension costs (the Union was previously a member of a pension scheme which is in significant deficit). Commitments have been made to clear this deficit, and an additional accounting adjustment of £193,000 has been made to reflect this.**Net income/expenditure for the year:*** Unrestricted funds: net income of £69,000
* Restricted funds: net expenditure of £92,000

This means that the clubs and societies have spent £92,000 more than what was brought in, but NM noted that this was taken from funds brought forward from previous years.NM referred to the fund balances at the end of the year and noted that there is a figure of minus £3million from unrestricted funds, and that the deficit is because of the pension liability.NM referred to the balance sheet and explained the reason why the overall position is minus (- £2.928 million) which includes the pension liability. He referred to the breakdown of the funds. There are restricted funds carried forward of £168,000. This is money raised and not yet spent by the clubs and societies. There are unrestricted funds of £684,000, which is the general reserves that the charity has to operate with.NM referred to his explanatory notes. In terms of the audit he is proposing a clean unmodified audit opinion, no major issues that need flagged to the board. The adjustments from the audit were presentational and to ensure correct treatment of the pension scheme, and there were no material errors identified in the management accounts.The Chair asked if there were any questions. AN referred to the comfort received from CK and her team and thanked the leadership team for keeping everyone right and for the clean bill of health. LO’C seconded this.NM and LO’C left the meeting. CK asked for approval of the accounts. Accounts were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 3: Apologies/Quorum count**The Chair noted apologies from AB, ER and WA. Quorum was achieved. The CEO confirmed that there were two Officer Trustees, two Student Trustees and two External Trustees present.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 4: Declaration of Interest**The Chair noted that there were no declarations of interest. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 5: Minutes of Last Meeting**The minutes from the last meeting on Thursday 3rd October 2024 were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 6: Matters arising**There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 7: Chairperson’s Remarks**The Chair noted that since the start of October (3rd) it has been a hectic time for the Student’s Union in terms of the overall engagement and campaigns. The Green Week campaign has been rolled out across the campuses. The Magee Taskforce delivered an event called ‘Delivering for Derry’. They met separately with Derry/L Derry and Strabane City Council to receive an endorsement for the Taskforce and its’ aims and the work it is currently doing, which was successful. The Chair thanked RA and MF for their work on this. The Chair also attended Beech Hill Country House with the Vice Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor’s Executive Group to lobby for additional tasks which will be communicated by the Officer team. The first Student Council took place on 30th October where Officers were able to present their Plan of Works as well as communicate their ambitions for the year to the Councillors. On 29th October the Chair met with Naomi Long to discuss the anti-spiking campaign. The Chair referred to the Prime Minister’s announcement on the anti-spiking legislation and he hopes that the Student’s Union will be a principal partner in shaping the NI legislation. The Chair also noted that they have met with the Magee Taskforce for the last two months and provided student input. The Chair referred to Prince William attending the Belfast campus on 14th November where they discussed some of the issues affecting students. The Student Officer team met with the University Council to present their key aims and asks for the year, which was met with enthusiasm from both Council and the Vice Chancellor’s Executive Group. The Chair thanked FO for her work on Sustainability, and thanked CM and CH who have been prioritising mental well-being. The Chair mentioned that the Student’s Union and Officer team presented to the Student Council, which was successful.The Chair referred to the Second Student Council on Wednesday where they were able to iron out some additional commitments to the Magee Taskforce.The Chair congratulated both the Student and External Trustees who have been re-appointed (DF, AP and EM).The Chair in ER’s absence noted that they have been attending and will be attending this weekend more rallies for violence against women and girls, which will hopefully increase their lobbying power and tie into their work on the anti-spiking legislation.No questions asked.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 8: Chief Executive Officer’s Report**The CEO referred to his report which was circulated prior to the meeting. The Chair referred to the two new Student Voice Coordinator roles. The CEO referred to CD’s role and the engagement aspect of this role with the clubs, as well as the engagement strategy that both CD and CO are working on for next semester.The CEO referred to the successful recruitment of MM for the Interim Management Role. The CEO referred to the Chancellor’s remarks as part of the budget, and the national insurance contribution which CK will review in terms of the budget for next year. It is expected to cost in the region of £30,000 for the year 2025/26. The CEO noted that they have incorporated Green Dot training into the agenda for the staff meeting, to give staff an idea of what they should do as a bystander when witnessing violence. The CEO hopes that this can be championed within the student community, with the aim to get as many students as possible to request this training within the University. In terms of the living wage the CEO referred to previous discussions and the University’s approach (paying the real living wage plus 50p), which the Student’s Union matched. The CEO referred to the recent increase in the living wage (£12.60); the Student’s Union is currently paying £12.50.CC and the CEO prior to the meeting discussed whether the flat rate of the real living wage should be paid. AB is looking into accreditation as a real living wage employer. The CEO’s recommendation is to pay at the base rate of £12.60 rather than keep the enhancement of 50p. The rationale behind this is that it is starting to affect the pay grades particularly towards the lower end, as the revised figure for the real living wage is not in keeping with inflation on the pay grades system.The CEO asked the Chair to seek approval of paying the rate of £12.60, to ensure RLW is matched, but to remove the 50p enhancement. CT asked whether the staff pay will still be uplifted. The CEO noted that it will be uplifted by 10p but not the 60p. CT asked how many staff will be impacted. The CEO said it impacts the student staff. CC confirmed that there are 6 student staff.This was approved. The CEO mentioned that next year they will need to undertake a deep dive into the risk analysis with board members and will put a date in the diary to look at the full risk register.AN referred to the desktop review of the Fresher’s activity and the areas identified for growth. AN referred to the year with Gavin on site being really successful and noted that this year didn’t feel as successful or positive having spoken to a few students, and that the Student’s Union presence wasn’t as visible as it could have been. AN asked the CEO what came out of the desktop review i.e. where there any big win items. The CEO confirmed that there are 19 recommendations that are being worked on for next year. The CEO acknowledged that the UUSU services should be front and centre, and on reflection SMT felt that the Student’s Union wasn’t showcasing itself as the first port of call. The CEO mentioned that next year there should be a UUSU zone central to Freshers where all the services are showcased. The CEO did also point out that the feedback collected by UUSU was positive. The difficulty is getting the same exhibitors out to both the Magee and Coleraine campuses. The marketing team is considering whether the Student’s Union can offer discounts, for example if an exhibitor showcases in Belfast they could exhibit at Magee/Coleraine for an attractive price.The CEO noted that space is an issue and that they are keen to continue this conversation with the University. The CEO also mentioned that a rota has been suggested to enable the organisation to better support the Fresher’s team, and particularly the lead up to Fresher’s. The CEO said that he would share the Fresher’s report as an appendix in the next set of papers.AN also referred to insufficient staff to deliver the services, and that this is likely to come out in some of the MI data. AN also referred to the lack of communication and noted that as an organisation of about 30 people you should be overcommunicating. This may be a useful conversation for the deep dive session later in the meeting.EM asked for the health and safety report to be circulated. The CEO agreed to include this on an ongoing basis on a document store that would be set up next year in the Trustee Board SharePoint area. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 9: Director of Finance and Business Support’s Report** CK shared her screen and showcased her two papers in respect of the budget for 24/25 and the first quarter of accounts. The accounts cover the first three months from 1st August until 31st October. CK noted that at the main meeting there were a lot of uncertainties at that time in relation to the final block grant. CK referred to changes that have happened in the figures as a result of the sport staff moving over to the University (their salaries have come out). The Student’s Union received additional funding as it is doing the administration, and they have also received funding for the new grade 5 position. In relation to the payroll cost, the largest cost, this has been updated to factor in the new cost of living/the new payroll arrangements. CK referred to the pay increase in March and August, and the increase in National Insurance contributions. In May the Student’s Union had a surplus of £12,650. There is now a deficit of £8,169. CK referred to the application to the VC for funding for £18,000 for the two award ceremonies, and if given then there will be a surplus of approximately £9000 (once included in accounts). If funding is not given, then the awards will be cut back.In terms of the actual accounts the income for the period was £540,000, (budgeted £542,000). CK noted that in terms of the admin, salaries and wages there is a substantial difference on what was budgeted, but this is due to the three vacant positions, and one was the Director role with a higher salary. Sport is higher than budgeted, but this is difficult to predict because it depends on the level of activity. CK said that sports should be higher as they didn’t have the coaching costs and referred to the ring-fenced amount of £210,000. Activities is higher than budget due to the Fresher’s activity. Student Voice is the converse with their big event being the elections in the second half of the year.Legal and consultancy fees are in a negative position as accounts provided for higher fees than the actual cost, as some expectation mitigation was achieved here, and will show as a credit to this line.Marketing is slightly higher than budget because of the one-off payment for lanyards and the contribution to the graphics done in the bar in Coleraine. CK noted that there is a surplus of £38,479 at the end of October which is very healthy for this time of year and should give comfort to the Board.In terms of the balance sheet there is £20,000 in fixed assets. Current assets are just over 1 million. There is a bit of money sitting in the bank. CK noted that at the next board meeting they will look at putting some more money on deposit.Current liabilities are £313,000. Total reserve is £716,000 which is healthy. CK mentioned that they aim to have it between £500,000-£600,000.No questions asked.   |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 10: Director of Human Resources & Campus Operation’s Report**CC referred to his report and the need for approval of the Menopause Policy and the Bylaw 7 Complaints procedure. CC updated the Board on the Student Voice Coordinator roles. There were 20 applications for both roles. CD was successful in the Engagement role and PF for the Academic role. CC referred to the Presentation given by Dr Platt on Responsible Future’s at the last meeting and noted that there were over 700 student surveys completed. The University was second in the UK with the number of completed surveys, and CC noted his thanks to the Officers in particular FO. CC referred to the reserved paper which is deferred to the meeting in January. CC referred to the last board meeting and the discussion surrounding the structure and format of the Director role, and that the Board were keen to engage with a recruitment agency. CC noted for information only at this stage that he has got in touch with MCS, Vanrath, and Hays. This can be discussed further when looking at the reserve paper.CC referred to the SMT amendments to Bylaw 7 to make the complaints process easier to manage. CC referred to the addition of a time limit when submitting complaints and a screening process to look at complaints when they are first submitted by a senior member of staff and another officer. CC mentioned that this has been passed by Student Council. The Chair confirmed that there were no concerns raised. CC sought approval for the Menopause Policy and Bylaw 7.The Chair asked if the Board endorsed the Menopause policy. AN replied that she is not 100% comfortable with the language in the employee section, where it indicates that if someone is going through the menopause that other people will be expected to be sympathetic. AN also noted that encouraging people to have healthy lifestyles could also be misinterpreted. AN said that the language may need to be reflected upon. AN said that if AP was happy with this then she is happy to defer on this point.AP said that she is happy to take this offline with AN and CC to tweak the language. AN said that she is happy to approve it on the basis of the language being tweaked so CC does not need to bring it back to the Board.The Board agreed to approve it on this basis. This was approved.The Chair asked if the additions/amendments to Bylaw 7 were agreed. The Board approved this. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 11: Future Reporting**Discussion of the following two papers:(a). CEO Paper tabled on 3/10/2024; and(b). Information request developed by Director of HRCO.The CEO referred to the effectiveness discussion with board members. The CEO and AN had put this into a new paper, but due to losing quorum at the last meeting they couldn’t progress it. The External Trustees then discussed the idea of doing a deep dive into each of the reports and to start with HR and Campus Operations. CC complied the 11b paper following the request for further information. AN suggested taking each report and dedicating a short period of time to see what is available and what would be useful to see.AN referred to CC’s report detailing 110 days of absence for stress. AN explained that the stress absence would be an immediate trigger and that this may already be on the lower-level risk register but queried whether there is an underlying cause for the stress and whether the Board needs to think about this. She also noted that there are six policies with a review date in February and whether review of the policies should be spread throughout the year. AP noted that it is not necessary to do a deep dive into the HR dashboard at every meeting but if it sits in the background and is updated every month by AB and is a part of SharePoint then questions could be raised off the back of the data. It is more about having the background information there for the Trustees to identify any patterns/risks going forward. CC said that is fine. The CEO referred to the Health and Safety Report which gets updated every time the committee meet, and that as discussed as part of the query here earlier, the Board could do with a living document folder within the Trustee Board SharePoint area to allow Trustees to review and asks questions based on the information provided. The Chair asked if this was for approval or discussion. The CEO suggested that the group could review CC’s paper to see what is available/useful in the first instance.CC asked AN if there were any further questions on the absences. AN said that her expectation on a meeting-by-meeting basis would be to have an insight into any absence trends to date/most recent to enable an early warning to be noted. AN noted that the stress didn’t appear to be work related but if people are going off with back related issues for example from a health and safety perspective is the Student’s Union undertaking the appropriate design workplace conversations. AP supported what AN discussed. In terms of the HR dashboard section for the Future Reporting document AP asked for more context around the absence data, for example what is the measure for long term absence. The data does not need to be on the report just any specific areas of concern that CC wished to raise. AP thanked CC for putting the information together. CC said that more detail can be provided in relation to the document folder. AN referred to points 2 & 3 and recognised the cost of running an external 360, but felt it would be useful to remain on the radar if budget allowed. AN mentioned the importance of doing an internal review/staff engagement survey to see where staff are at, and the CEO mentioned that this has been factored in for next year via the NUS portal which is completely anonymous. CC responded that the NUS engagement survey is extremely useful as it provides a benchmark against the other Unions and their data. This goes out in early 2025.AP explained that AB and herself took an action from the last meeting regarding an exit interview with GB and any considerations that may be needed before starting the recruitment process again. There were some positive opportunities that came out of this conversation about improving engagement and communications. AP and AB want to share this with the CEO and the external Trustees before bringing key points back to this forum. AN referred to points 4 & 5. AN said that there needs to be a mechanism in place to support Coleraine and Magee given their isolation to try and address the communication issues. AN also referred to succession planning within the organisation and if there are opportunities to allow people to try other things.AN referred to having a formal mechanism in place with regards to leavers and obtaining feedback.In terms of point 9 AN referred to upskilling staff/ training and whether this is something that the Student’s Union feels would be beneficial in supporting staff with.The CEO responded that they have a standing item on SMT where we review training requests at every single meeting. The request would go to the Manager, then to the Director who tables them for discussion. The CEO noted that they don’t get a lot of requests so it may be the case that this needs to be advertised more. FO and DS left the meeting (approx. 5.30pm). AN explained that there is a need to encourage people to stay particularly within a smaller organisation where there doesn’t always feel like there is any progression. AN also referred to hybrid working and that the organisation needs to decide what is best for the Student’s Union, not what suits people, and to try and get the balance right given that it is a student facing organisation. AN referred to point 4 and the leaver’s data. 9 resigning in a small organisation feels high. AN asked if the leadership team are comfortable with the 75% retention rate and whether there are any issues that need addressed.The CEO said that he would like the retention rate to be higher, but that a lot of the resignations were for progression. There are two or three we have had to take some learning from. There is a discussion around pay in almost every exit interview. There is also discussion around the breadth of benefits, many of which the Student’s Union doesn’t really have bar the hybrid working. CC said that there has been a significant increase in the number of staff leaving since or during Covid, and the majority of staff have left due to progression and after grade 5 there is nowhere for them to go. CC also noted that there were four staff that left which were sports related and not direct resignations, meaning the true figure is lower. CC mentioned that they are restricted with regards to the pay, but they are looking into possible benefits. AB has done a bit of work with regards to the HR software, and benefits that this may bring. Staff were asked at the last staff meeting in May what type of benefits they would like.The CEO said that they regularly benchmark with other Student’s Union’s. The CEO mentioned that in terms of benefits staff had asked about increases in pension contributions and medical cover, but it is trying to work out what is affordable.AP noted that this is a positive discussion, and that we have identified that there is a real issue about retaining grade 5 staff, whether this is a salary issue or progression issue. AP noted that the discussion may need to be taken offline in terms of some of the data to make sure that the percentages are comparable externally as well. In terms of retention AP targets a year-on-year improvement as a guide to success of any changes that are made, and 85-90% rate would be the benchmark of the target of where the organisation wants to be.CK asked the external trustees of their experience of having everyone in on the same day. AN said that as an organisation you must take a decision of what is right for you. If there are communication problems then having a day that everyone is on site is beneficial particularly in respect of collaboration, getting people together, for new starts, and useful for team meetings. It is also about trying to find ways that people in Coleraine and Magee feel more connected. As an organisation AN thinks that this is something that the Student’s Union could benefit from in the new year. The Chair also said that campus VP’s are on campus every single day of the week bar a few exceptions. The Chair noted that they are organising campus tour days to get more face time with the students, this is more targeted at the Officers. The capacity is not there for Coleraine and Magee.AP explained that if anchor days are not possible it would be helpful to have a calendar publicising the days that SMT and student officers are on each site. AP also mentioned that it is important that meetings are held periodically face to face, and that every member of SMT and Student Officers should be visible across all three campuses at various times for engagement purposes. The Chair responded that this is a good point and that the campus tour days fall underneath this. The Chair asked AP to clarify if she was suggesting a calendar as in a rota for staff being on campus. AP responded that she is suggesting a daily calendar so you can see who is on site to help with the engagement culture rather than email culture. The Chair responded that the Officer team do currently put where they are going to be on their calendars. For the Campus VPs this doesn’t apply to them as it is in their job title. It isn’t an issue about getting around the campuses, the Chair said that they are getting around the campuses, but it is worthy of discussion.CT asked whether there is any merit for an anchor day system for a team rather than a full organisational anchor day. The Chair responded that the Student Activities team do this over the summer. The Chair explained that each team has different dimensions and that it would be worthwhile discussing this at SMT.EM left the meeting (approx. 10minutes before the meeting ended).The CEO mentioned that an office calendar does exist for all, and that quarterly meetings for all staff to get together was being considered, as we only have 2 staff meetings a year where everyone comes together.The CEO asked if an additional purpose of CC’s reporting is to flag for Trustees any risks or trends that CC might be concerned about and address them as a Board. AN said that said that they expect to see the generic information (number of new joiners, number of leavers, and absence rates). It would be good to benchmark this against the previous year as per AP’s comments. It would be good to have stats in the background to back up what we are talking about and to also trigger the conversations that the Board needs to know about/have. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 12: Any other business**The University’s email regarding the Christmas break closure was discussed. It had already been decided that the SU would close on 24th December, but in lieu of the University announcement, it was agreed that the Student’s Union would also close on Monday and Tuesday (23rd/24th December).AP reinforced the importance of the consultative forum as identified in the CEO report to enable the Chair and Future Presidents to stick to membership and student related issues when they are with the Vice Chancellor and enquired if this could be moved forward. The Chair said this was not a problem.No other business.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13: Date of next meeting/Close of meeting**The next meeting will take place on 30th January 2025. |  |  |