

**Trustee Board Summary Minutes**

Held on 3rd April 2025 at 4.00 p.m.- Belfast: BA\_02\_012, Coleraine: H113A, and Magee: MD008A and Microsoft Teams

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| **Present:** | **In Attendance:**  |
| Ethan Davies, President (ED)Antoinette Bradley, Lay Trustee (Chair) (AB)Emily Roberts, Vice President, Education (ER)Christopher Murray, Vice President Coleraine (CM)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) |
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| **Apologies:** |  |
| Eoin Millar, Student Trustee (EM)Reece Armstrong, Vice President Magee (RA) |  |

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| **Meeting notes** | **Action** | **Update** |
| **Agenda Item 1: Responsible Futures**Dr Platt gave a summary of the SOS UK Responsible Futures Project and Accreditation and referred to the full report which was circulated prior to the meeting. Responsible Futures is an institution supported change program, with accreditation mark. There is now an international pilot for Responsible Futures. The program is designed to embed sustainability across all aspects of student learning, as well as for staff employee experience. We have a Responsible Futures Working Group which FO and CC are involved in on behalf of UUSU. We have representation across the University, and scope to involve additional students and colleagues particularly across professional services and facilities for the next round of re accreditation. Following the student led audit back in October 2024, the University was awarded with a Responsible Futures accreditation at the end of January which is valid for 2 years. The audit process will commence again in and around June 2026. If we are successful accreditation will be given in and around January 2027. Ulster University is the first Northern Ireland based University to secure this accreditation, and we were also the first on the Island of Ireland, with Trinty College Dublin being the second. There were 50 criteria within the framework. Dr Platt noted that there were some criteria which had gaps in it, so there is further work to be done which the audit report has helped steer the group to look at. The key themes are benchmarking, leadership and strategy, policy and commitment, interventions, and outreach. Dr Platt referred to the student feedback and shared some slides on her screen showing the three key recommendations. The first being the need for greater monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the activities and initiatives. Dr Platt should hopefully be able to share the analysis of the data collected via the National Student Survey at the next meeting. The second recommendation is regarding a more concrete collaboration between UU and UUSU on topics related to Responsible Futures. We have lots of events for students and staff but not many that bring students and staff together. There is a Green Skills Conference which might present an opportunity to come together around Green Week activities. Dr Platt hopes to have a meeting outside of the formal working group to discuss how to take this forward. It was also suggested that the VP Belfast could become Co Chair with Dr Platt for a strong partnership approach. The auditors also want to see clear evidence from the University on budgets, expertise, materials etc. to support collaboration. The auditors touched on the Green Impact and saw opportunities for those to cross over. They also mentioned a formal agreement between UUSU and UU to support a collaborative approach and to enhance the learner’s experience. The third recommendation is increased student involvement in sustainability, and looking at different methods of mapping SDGs and trying to find a way to have the student voice within the curriculum mapping and to get students to participate in the decisions around the mapping of SDG. The auditors also suggested giving students a role in analysing and publishing the survey data. As well as having a Co-Chair it was recommended to have a greater student representation and explore opportunities for ringfenced funding for students’ projects e.g.10p charge on single use cups. Dr Platt noted that we need to be mindful of the timeline for the next accreditation and how we have addressed the recommendations during this time. Dr Platt is planning on meeting with CC and FO to discuss how to take some of the recommendations forward so that they have something in place for the beginning of the academic year or before that.CC mentioned how instrumental FO was in the working group leading up to Responsible Futures and suggested that they meet next week after the working group and then they can discuss with Dr Platt once they have some suggestions in place on how to address this. FO confirmed that she will be involved in the Responsible Futures next year. Dr Platt asked FO to have a think about becoming Co Chair and this can be picked up after the next working group. Dr Platt mentioned that a more concise report is to be circulated soon which could be put up on the website. No questions asked. Dr Platt left the meeting. | CC and FO to meet to discuss the Responsible Futures report and its’ recommendations. |  |
| **Agenda Item 2: Welcome**The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 3: Apologies/Quorum count**The Chair noted RA and EM’s apologies**.** Quorum was achieved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 4: Declarations of Interest**There were no declarations of interest. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 5: Minutes of last meeting**The minutes of 6th February 2025 were approved. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 6: Matters arising**There were no matters arising. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 7: UUSU Business Development Officer**GN shared her screen. Her role as the Business Development Placement Student has involved trying to find other sources of funding to prevent UUSU solely relying on the block grant from the University, and to discover funding opportunities to support projects and campaigns ran by UUSU and to narrow down funding avenues to ensure a quicker more efficient search. GN has researched all the Student’s Unions in the UK to identify their funding sources. She has also looked into local charities to explore their partnerships. GN investigated Local Governments grants as well but most of these grants are geared towards capital grants or towards individuals. She has also used Grant Tracker NI to identify suitable grants and created a database to keep track of available grants and their timescale. In terms of other Student’s Unions, the majority are funded by their University’s block grant. Some do receive external funding from local councils or from a local charity for a specific project (common topics are sustainability, mental health, food banks). Local charities often partner with organisations to provide workshops and staff training but there isn’t always money involved. The most popular topics for grants are mental health, sustainability, and inclusivity. Grants will either be continuously open and have a quarterly selection period, or they will have a short period for applications with a closing date. They can reopen annually or are a one-off application. GN considered that it would be effective to search for available grants in a certain area and base campaigns or projects around this as it is hard to find suitable grants that line up with a project as they are often pre planned.GN referred to her Grant tracker where she has listed 23 grants. Out of the 23 grants 13 are suitable for UUSU, however many of these are currently closed for applications. 10 of these will re-open in the coming year. The seven grants that weren’t suitable were due to UUSU having too high an income (5 of the grants), one due to an unsuitable age group and the last one required the project to be open to the public. 3 of the 23 grants are suitable for UUSU and are open for applications. These are the DPD Ego Fund (supports projects that fight against climate change). They award up to £2000. Recipients are chosen on a quarterly basis. The second grant is from the Arts Council NI and they award £1500 to deliver art projects that reflect the diversity of NI. The last grant is the Garfield Western Foundation. GN referred to examples of suitable grants:1. The Vegan Society Grant- awards between £1000-£5000 – reopens in 2025
2. Garfield Weston Foundation- £1000-£1 million+- open all year round
3. Tackling Textiles Grant- £1000-£3000

UUSU could apply for skills-based projects to the Garfield Weston Foundation. GN considers that this is the most suitable grant for UUSU based off the broad range of projects they fund. GN also referred to the following suitable partnerships for UUSU:1. The Trussel Trust- Food Bank
2. The Lighthouse Charity- Suicide Prevention charity
3. Aware NI- Depression Charity

GN noted the challenges she faced which included income (grants requiring income of between £100,000-£1 million- there are some grants for larger charities such as National Lottery and Garfield Weston Foundation), student interest ( for example lack of volunteers for wellbeing gardens), eligibility, line up with projects and repeat funding (most are reluctant to fund organisations for multiple years in a row for example National Lottery funded UUSU for free breakfast last year but when we re applied this year it was refused due to repeat funding). GN also referred to examples of grants that are unsuitable. GN suggested that if her role is to be developed into a full-time role it needs to be structured in a way that the research for grants is focused on suitable areas such as mental health or sustainability, then work closely with the relevant people to plan projects around this area depending on the grant requirements and grant opening period. GN’s next suggestion was to obtain feedback from students through surveys or forms to pinpoint their interests and what they would volunteer for. Finally, GN mentioned that UUSU could avail of non-financial partnerships with charities or businesses that would provide workshops or training on important topics to staff and students.AN mentioned that GN’s work reinforces the importance and potential money that could be tapped into if this role is taken forward. GN’s research shows that all the small sums can add up quickly and the more strategic partnerships could be considered longer term. She thanked GN for her good work.AP agreed with this and mentioned that we have a moral obligation to further those relationships with external charities that are offering non-financial partnerships for the benefit of our students. We need to continue to keep looking at this to see what is available. AP asked if GN had any opportunity to look at commercial partnership. GN said she had been looking at the different workshops listed but this is something she could look into from the commercial side. AP said in terms of next steps for GN this is something that AP is keen for UUSU to progress. CC can give GN the background on this. AP mentioned that they had looked at ideas for having a student benefit scheme, i.e. commercial businesses across the three sites would pay UUSU to have access to our students to come trade/shop with them. When we did research a few years ago other Universities were working closely on this to try and drive revenue up. GN to look into this.CT queried how other Student’s Unions are funded and whether GN had come across any instances where a Student Union had partnered with a charity to do a consortium bid for funding, as this is common between charities. GN said the most common partnership was for food banks. CK said that GN did look at trying to source sponsorship for our awards, but the commercial side of things is challenging. She found it difficult getting responses. She has also sourced what discounts are available for students in the hope UUSU could approach outlets that are student friendly for discounts. This will probably be the next step to follow up with the various companies. ER thanked GN and mentioned that GN played a part in helping the officers find local companies and businesses that were willing to donate and partner with UUSU for the RAG week raffle. Working with GN has been beneficial for the student officers, which has helped boost their campaigns and they are planning a handover with GN to the Campus VPs to see how they can get more involved in the local communities. The Student Activities team have a volunteering section with CMcA which will help next year’s team.The CEO mentioned that there are very few, if any, Student’s Unions pulling in a multinational brand to partner with, and that they tend to partner with local businesses. This is likely to be the Partnerships direction of travel i.e. going out and approaching those businesses that are only in Belfast, Coleraine, and Derry to get them on board with UUSU and trying to get some exclusivity to our membership and potentially a rewards system. There is a lot of potential in this route. CC also mentioned that LH has made an informal relationship with some venues near the campuses for nighttime entertainment. The venues are happy for UUSU to use them but very reluctant to give UUSU anything back. They would offer discounts for students rather than give UUSU any benefits. This is something that we need to build on with GN.AP said in terms of sponsorship and looking towards the future we could look at linking into our website, so it gives direct access to our students in terms of promoting their organisations and events.No further questions. GN left the meeting.  |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 8: Chairperson’s remarks**The Chair referred to the new Officer team for 2025/2026 with the current VP of Education ER returning as President, CM for VP of Coleraine, and FO for VP of Belfast. The incoming officers are CH for VP Sport and Wellbeing, RR for VP Education, LD for VP Magee, and CM for VP Equality and Belonging. The Chair mentioned that they have been working on the handover process from the Officers and putting it into the hands of the organisation for a more standardised approach. On top of this they have also been ironing out some of the Officer roles. Some of the ideas include moving around some remits into different roles and putting more emphasis on the actual representational side of clubs and socs under the VP of Sport and Wellbeing.It has been a very productive semester with additional thanks to CM for running the Pantry’s, which have been up and running since last Monday. Students can get up to five items of free materials. CM thanked everyone who has helped with the Lifestyle hubs. The University is very complimentary of UUSU’s contribution.There has been a strategic development. UUSU has been given the go ahead by the VC‘s Office to get involved with the Dome in Derry, allowing UUSU to have more of a say in the development of the structure. We will hopefully be able to secure a space with the Student’s Union in the Dome, if not for clubs and socs at least for clubs to have a sort of social space. DF joined the meeting.We have been working on a change to our strategic direction for officer meetings and pushing officers to meet more with local MLA’s and MPs to give officers a taste of national lobbying and to make more of an impact in Northern Ireland.The Chair praised the officers for the two weeks of campaigning during elections. The Chair also mentioned that CC will cover the Director of Membership of Engagement update. No questions asked. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 9: Chief Executive Officer’s Report** The CEO referred to the stats for the leadership election. Turn out was about 15% of the student population, and last year it was 17%. This was anticipated as the number of candidates standing was less than last year. The CEO mentioned that he has more detailed stats that he can share with the Board upon request around the individual role votes and the mean amounts which show an overall increase over five or six of the officer roles. The Student’s Unions across the UK and Ireland have around a 15% to 20% turnout, so this is a strong turn out figure. The CEO referred to the video showing the results party. The CEO looks forward to welcoming the new Officers to the team.The CEO confirmed that UUSU has received confirmation that the University has approved the Awards funding. The VC mentioned that he would like to see these awards get bigger and better as he appreciated what they represented. UUSU has asked for the funding on a recurring basis and is hopeful this will be appended to UUSU’s block grant.The document store is now live and contains some of the core organisational documents that the Board can dip in and out of. The incoming director documents will follow. If there is anything within the document store that needs attention this will be appended to a report as an item. Once of the documents within the document store is the Operational Planning Document. There was a meeting about 10 days- 2 weeks ago of the group which consists of all those who have a leadership role within the organisation. There was a lot of feedback and comments on progression. The CEO is to upload this for Trustees to review and consider as they wish. Interesting themes that have come out of the discussions include AI and how younger people are using AI as a first means of searching, and if we can look to see whether there is a way we can extrapolate this into our website. Another interesting theme is students as consumers. Our Advice Bureau is getting a lot of questions around this and there are various pieces of work going on to hold the University to account to comply with their CMA guidance. The CEO also referred to UUSU seeking compensation for those students whose courses change location midway through their studies. In terms of the risk register we still have the worry around long-term financial security of clubs notwithstanding the representations made on behalf of Trustees that made some traction on agreeing a short-term mechanism for funding.One to put on the Boards radar is the Shared Ireland Fund Contribution. The sequencing of this is important, for example the University want to get a lot more students on campus before some of the investment in support services has taken place which is a concern and presents a challenge of not having additional resources to support the student population. This is to be flagged as a potential risk but the Chair, ER and the CEO are continuing to push this through the working group with a view to finding a solution. It is not an immediate problem as this is to take place over 5 years. The upcoming focuses are on the new Officer team with the Chair, ER, the CEO and MM leading on this piece of work e.g. onboarding, ensuring a robust handover, keeping in touch days, welcome pack etc.We are in the process of reviewing UUSU’s data sharing agreement with the University. We have modeled it in a way to get more data to allow us to target some of the student groups that are hard to reach e.g. mature students/post graduate students.The CEO took the rest of his report as read. AP asked if it is new students/new courses at Magee, or if it is a re-jigging of current student numbers and courses. The CEO said that it would be brand new and there would be an additional headcount. It is based on money that the University has secured from the Shared Ireland Fund. The release of this money is based on new students coming in. The artists’ impressions of the new building look good and the investment is good for the campus, but it is not without concerns. We want to make sure that the extra students on campus do not have a substandard experience. AP noted that it is a strategic piece of work for UUSU. The CEO noted that the current infrastructure and resources won’t work, and the concern is that the building will be up for 2 years before investment in the SU frontage is developed, and there won’t be the staff or space to help students. AP asked if we would expect the block grant in the future to reflect the increase in student numbers and resources. The CEO said that it would need to be increased in line with student numbers otherwise the resource coverage wouldn’t be satisfactory.No further questions.The Chair provided an additional update that he forgot to mention. He referred to the launch of the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Charter, which was attended by 3 MLA’s including Claire Hanna along with the Student’s Unions in Northern Ireland. It was a great success and thanked ER. A UUSU working group will be formed to tackle this issue. CT said it was brilliant to see the Officers linking their work to Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls, and that this is a core priority for the PFG. CT wanted to know if there are any other avenues that have been identified to link the new strategic work to the PFG. The Chair said that this would also link into the Magee Taskforce. SK, the Taskforce Chair, is going to keep us on when the taskforce mandate expires in either 2027 or 2028. UUSU’s representation is guaranteed until the Taskforce expires, and the Chair has received assurances from the VC that UUSU will be included in any further updates. ER mentioned that she has been invited to sit on the Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Working Group at Stormont on behalf of Ulster University, as well as sitting on a group with the PSNI and the Justice Minister to see how Student Unions can play a key role in supporting the PSNI to achieve their strategy. We now have lobbying power because of this charter. This charter is the first of its’ kind and it has now been adopted down South so it will be an All-Ireland Charter within a couple of months. We have mandated power to do work and ER thinks this is going to go far. Taking GN’s research into funding we might have a chance to fund this a lot further. This alongside the Green Dot Program means that we can now start working closely with women in Politics.  | CEO to upload an updated Operational Planning update to the document store. |  |
| **Agenda Item 10: Director of Finance and Business Support’s Report**CK referred to the SUSS AGM and explained that it is the Students Union Superannuation Scheme which opened in the 1980s in conjunction with NUS for Student Union employees and closed in 2011 as it was no longer financially viable. All participants are still paying towards getting the scheme into a stable position. The AGM was held on 18th March. The financial picture looks better. It fluctuated around 45-47% funded for a long time but at the end of February it was 63% funded. The actuarial evaluation is due on 30th June to look at the overall picture and will decide the liability and what payments we make. They have 15 months to get it finalised so the new calculations will be in October 2026. The pension scheme payments go up by 5% every year depending on the valuation as at 30th June 2025. CK felt from the AGM that things were more stable. There are a number of Unions that have left the scheme (9 have left since we had the meeting on 18th March and two more larger Unions have left since, Loughborough and Warwick, which had similar deficits to Ulster University). Back in September the SUSS Trustees published the liabilities of all Unions that were part of the scheme. Our liability back at the beginning of September was three and a half million. We are in the top 10 of Unions with the largest deficits. Our deficit is between 3-4% of the actual total deficit of the scheme, NUS has a deficit of 9%. UUSU does not have the money to buy out its’ liability. The CEO will raise this when he is having the budget allocation meeting with the University Director of Finance. The SUSS Trustees also update the British Director of Finance Groups. There were concerns about NUS and their historical financial issues. The CEO explained how they fund the position which is in the uploaded paper. UUSU will need to keep the University updated on this.AN asked CK when some of the other Unions leave the scheme, does this leave any impact on those left behind. In theory CK said it should help us as they often pay more than their liability and they also take on orphan liabilities which are shared with anybody that is left, and they also pay the costs involved. There is a graph on the paper which explains this. CK said that when they get the deficit into a better position the overall plan is to get an insurance company to buy it over. At the moment the repayments schedule is up to 2037 but there is talk about bringing it back to 2035. CK referred to the management accounts which are in the same position. Income is on budget and expenditure is slightly down due to payroll costs and the Membership Director position being vacant. The Sports Union is overspent. CK does not think the overspend is going to be as bad as last year, but March accounts have not yet been finalised. From UUSU’s perspective it still only spends the amount it has been allocated because of the ring-fenced budget. CK considers that we are likely to have a substantial surplus at the end of the year of around £80K to £90k, which will be added to reserves. We discussed at the Operational Planning meeting some possibilities on how to spend the money but CK noted that it is good to have the surplus added to the reserves due to the additional employer National Insurance and the VC mentioning that the University is trying to find overarching savings. No further questions asked. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 11: Director of Human Resources and Campus Operation’s Report**Items tabled to reserved minutes.AB, UUSU HR Advisor, discussed the policies that have recently been reviewed. She explained that we have 7 policies that have been uploaded for review and comment. Our Policy Schedule has been revised to allow time for approval and review. AB referred to the list of policies for renewal in June and October. AN referred to the Salary Sacrifice Policy and mentioned that we should have a disclaimer in this to say that if your decision takes you below national minimum wage UUSU as an organisation can refuse that the employee opts for the salary sacrifice. There are a few things in terms of the Whistleblowing Policy which AN will email AB about rather than discuss now.AB referred to the return-to-work interviews which are conducted by line managers and then forwarded to AB for monitoring purposes. AB oversees the Student Officer absences as they hold elected positions and completes their return to work meetings. AB mentioned the retention rates. Since November there have been no staff departures, therefore for the first four months of this year UUSU’s retention rate stands at 100%. AB referred to the Staff Engagement Survey, with the last Survey having been conducted in 2018. It went live on 10th February and closed on 28th February. The results will be released on 14th April. 23 out of 32 staff completed the survey. A key piece of work will be using the results to implement any changes and action planning, and AB will be attending a couple of sessions provided by NES and Agenda Consulting. CK asked what the average response rate would be. AB said completion of the survey is entirely voluntary, but she would have hoped that the response would have been a bit higher. CK agreed that it was low for a small organisation and that she tried to encourage her team to complete the survey. AB is not aware of the expected response rate. AB felt that staff may have been worried that their responses were not going to be confidential, but she tried to reassure staff that nobody can be identified through the survey. AN said that the minimum standard for a 3-star company would be 87%. You would want to have a minimum of 75%. UUSU has a chance between now and the next survey to make staff feel more confident to speak up. No further questions. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 12: Any other business**There was no other business. |  |  |
| **Agenda Item 13: Date of next meeting/Close of meeting.**The next meeting is at the end of May. |  |  |