

**OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNION  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES (BoT)  
28 April 2026**

**MINUTES**

Minutes of the hybrid meeting of the Board of Trustees (BoT) held on 28 April 2026 at 9.30am, online via Microsoft Teams and in-person on the OU Campus, Milton Keynes.

**PRESENT**

Mark Price, Chair  
Natalie Baker, President/Deputy Chair  
Kelly Coker, Student Trustee  
Kimberley Kennedy, VP Administration  
Alan Measures, External Trustee  
Matt Porterfield, Student Trustee  
Adelaide Ribaud, Student Trustee  
Claire Wallace, Student Trustee  
Andrew Wilson, Deputy President

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Heather Bloomer, Deputy Director of Marketing & Communications  
Angus Fok, Management Accountant (item 4, Finance Report)  
Paul Holmes, Finance Officer (item 4, Finance Report)  
Thomas Mitchell, Project Manager (item 3, Rules Revision)  
Beth Pacey, Chief Executive  
Taina Nicolicin, Director People and Finance  
Dan Moloney, Director Strategy and Democracy  
Jack Flaherty, FASS Representative (SLT observer)

<b>BUSINESS ITEMS</b>
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**A. WELCOME**

A.1 The Chair welcomed Trustees to the meeting.

## **B. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- B.1 Gearoid O’Bravender, Student Trustee – received  
Claire Stibbon, External Trustee – received  
Lily Joale, Student Trustee – none received

## **C. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

- C.1 The January 2026 minutes were approved via MS Teams.

<b>SECTION B: ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE DECISION</b>
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### **1. SLT OFFICER TRUSTEE UPDATE**

#### **1.1 OU Engagement:**

Significant momentum from recent work on ‘what we believe in hub’ with OU senior leadership team and department heads. The OU showing strong willingness to address student concerns, though there's risk they may consider work "done" without ongoing accountability

VC Dave Phoenix keen to reduce siloed working and increase accountability across Pro-Vice Chancellor portfolios. Student consultations went well with good attendance including many new students and first-year students, not as high as we would like, so more work to ascertain what the Open SU get out of these sessions.

Students expressing a demand for more face-to-face engagement and community activities.

#### **1.2 AI Policy and Academic Misconduct:**

Major confusion across student body due to inconsistent AI policies between modules and faculties. Mychelle Pride in the Pro Vice Chancellor – Students office is leading group to improve communication about AI use.

Policies vary by category (some modules allow AI in assignments, others prohibit it entirely) causing confusion for students on multiple modules or open degrees. OU Staff are also polarised on AI use - some faculties (STEM, FASS) strongly opposed while others embracing it.

There are plans to establish student AI consultation panel, we are working to ensure the right students are in the room for these conversations.

## **2. PLANNING FOR STRATEGY REFRESH 2027-31**

- 2.1** Our current strategy was designed with long-term aims that should accommodate any new priorities, rather than us seeing this new strategy as a complete rehaul it should focus on aligning with any developments we have made but keep overall focus the same.
- 2.2** Opportunity for incoming and outgoing SLT to review objectives together in July joint meeting, new SLT will then be in a good position to contribute.
- 2.3** Any significant strategic shifts would require clear consensus.
- 2.4** The board **approved** this approach and the proposed timelines presented in the paper.

## **3. Byelaws Rules Revision 2025-26**

- 3.1 Open SU vs OU Students Association legal name:** Question of whether to formally change legal name from "Open University Students Association" to "Open SU". Trustees discussed the current situation of 'trading as'. There was limited appetite for making this change within the room since many companies use trading names successfully; formal change would require significant expense and effort across multiple systems and OU policies; resources better spent on student-facing activities. The suggestions was to ensure there is clarification at the start of the articles/byelaws as appropriate for awareness. This change was **not approved**.
- 3.2 England Rep role:** role largely covered by course representatives and President as well as not having dedicated nation-specific work like Scotland, Wales, Ireland representatives. Other nations have dedicated OU staff teams; England-related regulatory work (OFS) handled at organisational level and would be picked up by other SLT members and staff. The recommendation to remove the England Rep role from the articles was **approved**.

- 3.3** Other recommendations: The board approved the recommendations on the 10 submissions for bye-law/article changes.
- 3.4 ACTION:** changes to the following articles will be actioned through our process for conference: Removal of the England Rep role.
- 3.5 ACTION:** changes to the following byelaws will be actioned through our process for amending the bye-laws:
- “make co-options easier in the first year of an SLT term”. Specifically that: “... greater flexibility is introduced, allowing for co-option to fill vacancies within an initial period (e.g. the first six months), with individuals serving on an interim basis until a by-election is held”.
  - that the Deputy President should be able to assume the President role should it become vacant at any point during a term. (At the moment this only applies after a year into the President’s term.)
- 3.6 ACTION:** ensure that a clarifying statement is added to our governing documents to explain the trading name Open SU.

#### **4. FINANCE REPORT AND 2026-27 DRAFT BUDGET**

- 4.1 Update on implementation of Xero and Moss:** Successfully transitioned from Iplicit to Xero and Moss approximately six months ago. Previous system (Iplicit) was overly complex, designed for much larger organisations, with convoluted reporting and extensive manual processes. New system implementation included extensive planning, chart of accounts review, user acceptance testing, and comprehensive staff training. Go-live occurred in August with ongoing continuous development and refinement.
- 4.2 Key system improvements:**
- 4.3**
- Virtual cards through Moss eliminate need for staff and volunteers to use personal funds - approximately 500 transactions processed with excellent policy compliance.
  - Invoice processing now 100% accurate using autofill technology, saving approximately 30 minutes daily.
  - Streamlined approval workflows with payments processed directly through Moss system.
  - Significantly simplified VAT submission process.

User satisfaction saw 22 respondents (budget holders) give satisfaction rating of avg 8.9/10. Main area for improvement: reducing email

notification volume and exploring AI adoption within the systems for future enhancements.

**4.4 Current year performance:** Original budget projected £219,000 deficit; forecast now shows approximately £60,000 loss - favourable variance of £160,000. Savings driven by staff vacancies and maternity leave, but this limited project delivery capacity and therefore other operational underspends were also experienced due to not being able to start work until recruitments were completed. Eight of ten departments showing favourable variances, with largest savings in P4Q (£63k), PDI (£33k), and programs. Reserves forecast to close at £1.94 million, within approved level.

**4.5 2026-27 Budget:** Proposed draft budget with a deficit of £241,000 (compared to £219,000 this year). This budget represents a Strategic shift: increased staff costs, reduced non-staff costs to ensure capacity for project delivery. Staff costs represent 72.5% of expenditure budget; 62% of all spending goes directly to charitable objects. New key investment areas include student voice capacity (1.6 FTE - full-time representation officer plus part-time representation officer), student advice, and commercial developments. These roles are all offered on a fixed term basis of 18 months to allow for work to ensure we manage the organisation in a manner to reduce our costs and increase our income to no longer be setting a deficit budget in 2 years' time for these positions.

The trustees **approved** the draft budget.

The trustees **approved** the new reserve policy.

**4.6 ACTION:** Final budget to come to July Board meeting.

**4.7 Investment Strategy and Subvention Grant:** We have successfully secured full subvention grant payment in advance from the university, this will allow us more flexibility to chose how to invest funds whilst they are in our accounts. Chris Roach (FRRC) to arrange preliminary non-committal conversations with investment companies with Taina – any formal appointment will require full selection process and board approval.

Subvention report (preliminary) by Counter Culture revealed Open SU to be one of lowest-funded student unions compared to benchmarks (some at £92/student, £76, £51 vs. Open SU circa £20/student).

Real term funding has declined approximately 25% over seven years due to university's return to savings programs. We will be developing a

proposal for more robust subvention grant approval process with university.

- 4.8 ACTION:** continue to develop a clear formal process for subvention grant negotiation and award.
- 4.9 ACTION:** Use opportunities to talk with VCE to grow collaborative efforts to ensure they recognise the value from a thriving SU.

## **7. PEOPLE PLAN** (*was moved up the Agenda*)

- 7.1 Current staff survey results:** Work-life balance: 96% (genuine cultural strength to protect). Happiness at work: 67% (area to watch, targeted investments planned). Decision-making comfort: 44% (high risk area - staff unclear about who makes decisions and why). Manager leads by example: needs improvement. Decision-making score improved from 21% in Q1 to 44% in Q2. Ensure scores are shared with Trustees via CEO report quarterly from new term (Aug).
- 7.2** People plan overview: First comprehensive people plan for the organisation, spanning April 2026-July 2027. Plan informed by independent HR diagnostic (Paragon people), team's business plan developed with Paragon people, Investors in People accreditation, and quarterly staff surveys. Transitioning from Investors in People to Great Places to Work certification for better annual survey capabilities.

The six pillars of the plan are -

1. Leadership - developing management consistency.
2. Communication - improving transparency and decision-making clarity.
3. Talent and growth – psychometric/skills-based assessments and effective recruitment.
4. Wellbeing and belonging - wellbeing audits, mental health training, wellbeing action plans.
5. Working together - staff forum introduction.
6. People foundations - policy overhaul, benefits review, systems implementation.

- 7.3** Trustees felt that the plan addressed well some of the concerns raised by the diagnostic and the direction fitted with our strategic approach. There were comments made about the ambitious scope of the change and the timeline applied. The University will be essential to support the

transition, particularly if payroll is brought in house/onto a new system.

- 7.4 ACTION:** Review timeline and ensure we are being realistic in what can be delivered.

<b>STANDING ITEMS</b>
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**9. EDI UPDATE and GROUPS REPORT**

9.1 The report was noted on Teams.

**11. APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE REPORT**

12.1 The report was noted on Teams.

**13. STRATEGY UPDATE**

13.1 The report was noted on Teams.

**14. STAFFING REPORT**

14.1 This item was noted under the HR & Confidential channel on Teams.

**15. FRRRC UPDATE**

15.1 This item was noted on Teams.

<b>UPDATES &amp; DISCUSSION ITEMS</b>
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**15) ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

15.1 FRRRC/Risk Review Workshop (today)  
12.30 – 1.25pm, joint lunch, Mulberry Suite (in Hub)  
1.30 – 4pm, Christodolou, CMR 15 & foyer.

15.2 BoT/Strategic Workshop (afternoon of July's meeting)  
22 July 2026, 1.30 – 4pm.

15.3 Chair and CEO 360 reports will be sent via email soon, please complete as soon as possible to support development discussions.

**16) DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 22 Jul 2026

9:30-12:30 – on campus/hybrid option

Discussions will continue online in the meantime and there will be Minutes of this meeting for ALL to approve on MS Teams.

<b>Non-Confidential Action Log</b>		
<b>Item in the Minutes</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Action holder</b>
3.4	Changes to the following articles will be actioned through our process for conference: Removal of the England Rep role.	Dan Moloney
3.5	Changes to the following byelaws will be actioned through our process for amending the bye-laws:  - “make co-options easier in the first year of an SLT term”. Specifically that: “... greater flexibility is introduced, allowing for co-option to fill vacancies within an initial period (e.g. the first six months), with individuals serving on an interim basis until a by-election is held”.  - that the Deputy President should be able to assume the President role should it become vacant at any point during a term. (At the moment this only applies after a year into the President’s term.)	Dan Moloney
3.6	Ensure that a clarifying statement is added to our governing documents to explain the trading name Open SU.	Dan Moloney
4.6	Final budget to come to July Board meeting.	Taina Nicolicin
4.8	Continue to develop a clear formal process for subvention grant negotiation and award.	Taina Nicolicin / Beth Pacey

4.9	Use opportunities to talk with VCE to grow collaborative efforts to ensure they recognise the value from a thriving SU.	Beth Pacey / President
7.4	Review timeline and ensure we are being realistic in what can be delivered.	Taina Nicolicin