

# Report of the Board of Trustees 2022-24



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# Current Membership

- **Mark Price** - External Member (Chair)
- **Margaret Greenaway** - President (Deputy Chair)
- **Michael Bryan** - VP Administration
- **Mark Walker** - Deputy President
- **Claire Wallace** - Student Trustee
- **Johnathon Doran** - Student Trustee
- **Dr Charles Phua** - Student Trustee
- **Anca Seaton** - Student Trustee
- **Fanni Zombor** - Student Trustee
- **Claire Stibbon** - External Member
- **Alan Measures** - External Member

# Introduction

Our Board of Trustees is responsible for the management and administration of the Association, subject to relevant legislation and the Association's Articles and Bye-Laws.

This includes responsibility for the governance, staffing, finance and strategy of the Association. The Trustees also have the ultimate responsibility within the Association to ensure the viability and sustainability of the organisation.

All work approved by the Trustees must be driven by our charitable objects:

- Defending the principles of equal opportunity and of open access to the University regardless of academic qualifications or financial circumstances.
- Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the Open University during their period of study and representing and supporting students.
- Being the recognised representative channel between students and the Open University and any other external bodies.
- Asserting that all students studying with the Open University have the right to have their views heard and acknowledged by the University; and
- Providing social, cultural, and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its students.

This Report provides an overview of key decisions and activities undertaken by the Trustees during the 2022-24 term within four headings: governance, staffing, finance and strategy.

For those seeking more information, this report can be read alongside other published information and reports including:

- Non-confidential minutes from each meeting which are published on the Association's website: [www.OUstudents.com](http://www.OUstudents.com) > About Us > Trustees.
- Regular reports from the Board of Trustees to the Central Executive Committee which are published on our website. [www.OUstudents.com](http://www.OUstudents.com) > About Us > Student Leadership > Meetings and Papers
- The Association's full audited accounts, which are published on our website under 'Accounts' in the 'About Us' section or via the Charity Commission's website.

The Trustees are incredibly proud of the work undertaken over the two year term, by our elected leaders, staff team and our dedicated student representatives and volunteers, without whom none of our good work would be possible!

It has been an exciting but challenging two years, with many changes we have had to flex and adapt to. Since Conference 2022 both the University and the Association have been establishing what it looks like to operate in a post-covid world. This has meant an increase in the need for us to advocate for students who are being impacted by the cost-of-living crisis and a mental health pandemic as well as managing a reduction in our financial subvention (funding) from the University.

# Governance

The term began with the departure of our previous Chair, so Mark Price took on the Interim position for a period of 6 months before being formally elected by the Board on 31 January 2023.

On 1st August 2022 several new Trustees took up their roles on the Board. These included the three Officer Trustees (President, Deputy President, and VP Administration), and four newly elected Student Trustees who joined one returning Student Trustee.

A by-election was held in November 2022 where another Student Trustee was elected to the Board to fill the remaining Student Trustee position. At this time, two External Trustees were also co-opted to the board to support our work.

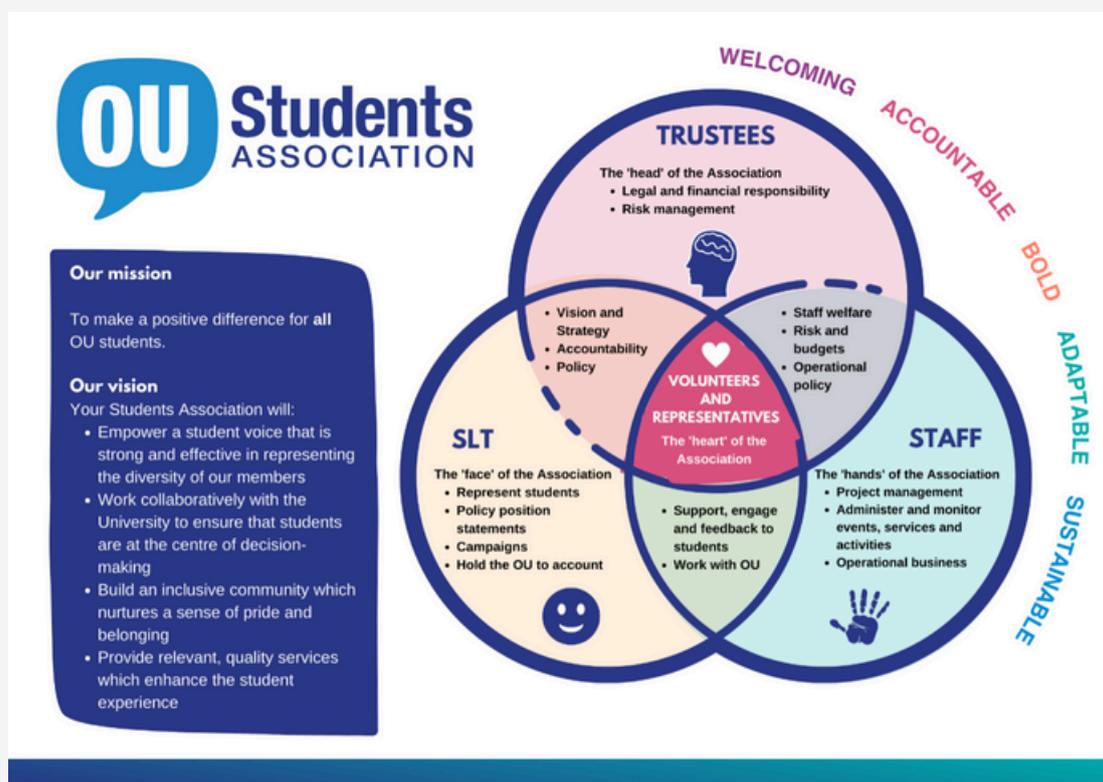
The following changes took place between 1 August 2022 and April 2024 (the time of writing this report):

- Co-option of Laura Charles – 18 October 2022.
- Co-option of Richard Dobek – 18 October 2022.
- Election of Sarah Pickersgill – 5 December 2022.
- Mark Price appointed as Chair – 31 January 2023.
- Resignation of Laura Charles – 22 August 2023.
- Resignation of Sarah Pickersgill – 11 October 2023.
- Resignation of Richard Dobek – 24 January 2024.
- Resignation of Gareth Jones – 18 March 2024.
- Co-option of Mark Walker – 25 March 2024.
- Co-option of Claire Stibbon – 25 March 2024.
- Co-option of Alan Measures – 25 March 2024.

Following the 2022 Conference, the Board of Trustees recognised that the resolutions put to Conference were not upheld due to resolutions not meeting the recognised and required 75% majority to implement. The Trustees commissioned the Interim Chief Executive Officer to explore other ways we could achieve the recommendations of our Governance review to allow us to improve transparency and understanding of our governance structures whilst respecting the outcome of the voting.

Some changes made to improve understanding of the Association's governance structures and to ensure openness and transparency include:

- Referring publicly to our elected team as the Student Leadership Team instead of the Central Executive Committee - this aimed to 'demystify' this team and what they do, allowing us to appeal to more students. Since the name change, we have seen a marked increase in awareness of the Student Leadership Team and what they do in our Annual Membership Survey.
- Schedule of Work and Schemes of Delegation established to ensure clear differences between the Trustees (the head of the organisation) and the Student Leadership Team (the face of the organisation).
- Graphics developed to support understanding of our governance structure.
- Talking regularly about our Student Leadership Team and publishing regular 'news stories' sharing information, wins and opportunities.
- Creating more engaging Student Leader updates in line with their Quarterly meetings.
- Making all meetings of Student Leadership Team and Trustees Hybrid, to open attendance opportunities to more students.



There is still work to be completed and we have presented some resolutions to this 2024 conference in the hope of increasing representation of underrepresented groups on the elected team and to allow us to run an election every year and separate out the important roles of the Student Trustees and the Elected Leadership team to be clear about the difference between these two teams.

# Staffing

This term has seen a period of movement and adjustment within the OU Students Association staff team but we have not been in a position of growth since the last Conference in January 2022.

At the last Conference (2022) we reported 43 staff (38.07 FTE) and at the time of Writing this report (April 2024) we have 43 staff (37.79FTE).

Details of staff joining and leaving the team are noted below:

Name	Position	Reason	Date
Sammi Wright	Student Welfare Officer	Maternity leave	19 January 2022 - 18 January 2023
Adnan Raham	Senior Policy Manager	New starter	4 May 2022
Sue Mcabee	Head of Strategy and Insights	Retirement	30 June 2022
Rob Avann	CEO	Resignation	22 July 2022
Denisa Bartova	Volunteer and Representation Administrator (maternity cover)	New starter	5 September 2022
Sarah Smerald	Volunteer and Representation Administrator	Maternity leave	3 October 2022 - 11 September 2023
Chibwe Mushibwe	Student Advisor	New starter	29 November 2022
Reiss Miller	Events and Projects Officer	Maternity leave	24 January 2023 - 2 April 2024
Ellie Milnes-Smith	Volunteer and Representation Officer	Resignation	10 March 2023
Adnan Rahman	Senior Policy Manager	Contract ended - departure	30 March 2023
Heather Bloomer	Senior Digital Communications Officer	Seconded to OU Marcomms team for 18 months	1 May 2023
Jazz Simpson	Policy and Representation Officer	New starter	14 August 2023
Eleanor Sear	Digital Campaigns Officer	New starter	14 August 2023
Linda Arabi	EDI Officer	Maternity leave	6 September 2023 - unknown
Denisa Bartova	Volunteer and Representation Administrator (maternity cover)	Contract ended - departure	30 September 2023

Paul Holmes	Business Services Administrator	New starter	31 October 2023
Rachael Ishmael	EDI Officer (maternity cover)	New starter	27 November 2023
Sarah Smerald	Volunteer and Representation Administrator	Resignation	14 December 2023
Poroush Dixit	Volunteer and Representation Administrator	New starter	12 February 2024
Danielle Cafearo	Volunteer and Representation Officer	Maternity leave	1 March 2024 - unknown
Rebecca Coster	Strategy and Insights Administrator	Resignation	8 March 2024
Gareth Jones	Volunteer and Representation Officer (maternity cover)	New starter	18 March 2024
Alison Lunn	Associate Director of Finance and Compliance	Resignation	22 April 2024
Jasmine Ewart	Media and Admin Assistant (secondment cover)	New starter	30 April 2024

Over the course of the 2022-24 term, we have been proud to continue our work to support students and were excited to announce our permanent commitment to the Student Advisors who are providing individual representation to students who are going through the complaints process at the university. This service has been personally praise by members of the University's VCE and we have seen demand growing in this area.

At the beginning of our term we saw the departure of our long-term Chief Executive, Rob Avann, who had served the Association for 10 years, receiving HLM status on his departure for all of his hard work. The torch was passed on to Beth Metcalf, previously Director of Membership Services, who took on the role on an interim basis in 2022 before impressing the panel at interview to take on the permanent position in January 2023. This left a Senior Leadership position available and Jess Smith was appointed to the position of Associate Director for Projects and Services in April 2023 following an interim period.

Over the years we have seen movement in and out of roles, saying goodbye to some fantastic individuals and welcoming new staff to take the reins. We boast a supportive work environment, which fosters development and opportunities for staff, putting us in the best position to support student leaders to achieve their manifesto goals and to allow staff to drive the strategy forward.

At their January 2024 meeting, the Trustees made changes to staff policy to ensure they are creating a work culture they can be proud of:

- Committing to pay all staff the London Real Living Wage as a minimum,
- Increasing paternity leave to 6 weeks full pay, changing the name to 'partner leave'
- Ensuring additional support for carers,
- Expanding flexible working to support those experiencing menopause or menstrual difficulties,
- Confirming our approach to Hybrid working.

# Finance

The finances of the Students Association and the OU Students Shop can be viewed in the Association's audited accounts. OUSET is a separate charity, with a separate set of audited accounts.

The Business Services Team, in conjunction with Vice President Administration, continue to work with the appointed auditors, Haysmacintyre, in carrying out their external audit and assisting on various financial matters.

Over the period, Trustees have maintained a similar budget to the previous years, though the next two years will see a significant reduction to our annual block grant (subvention) from the University.

We were disappointed not to receive continued financial support from the University for our Individual Representation Service, but the Board agreed this was a crucial service for students and have committed to cover the continued costs from our existing subvention.

This change and the 8.11% reduction to our subvention in 2024/25 and 5.27% reduction in 2025/26 will mean we need to scale back some of our work, but we are working on prioritisation of services which have the biggest impact for students and are looking at ways to achieve savings through reviewing our current structures and moving some face-to-face events to hybrid and online provisions where possible. This will ensure we can continue to provide services and continue to effectively represent students and provide support when students need it.

Below we have included our three-year financial forecast, showing the impact of the reductions to our subvention. In 2022/23 we worked on cost saving initiatives to ensure we could still provide our individual representation service and to reduce the impact of reduction to our subventions. This included; staff taking career breaks or voluntarily reducing hours as well as combining some roles as individuals have naturally left the team. The Board also had to make the tough decision to move our Conference online and remove some face-to-face meetings for our SLT, BoT and some other roles, embracing a hybrid model to allow more students to access meetings.

Moving forward the Association will be focusing on ensuring students get the best value for money and that our core services are protected.

INCOME	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26		2026/27
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Core subvention - OU revised proposal	2046	-166	1880	-99	1781	0	1781
		-8.11%		-5.27%		0%	
Individual Rep Funding	0		0		0		0
%age reduction		-100					
Ouset Management Fee	47		47		47		47
TOTUM	25		25		25		25
Trading income	79		79		79		79
Investment income	71		46		33		32
Investment income	3		3		3		3
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>2271</b>		<b>2080</b>		<b>1968</b>		<b>1967</b>
EXPENDITURE	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26		2026/27
	£'000		£'000		£'000		£'000
Staff Costs (recurrent)	1522		1522		1522		1522
Conference Project Manager	38		0		38		0
Time-limited projects staff costs	19		22		0		0
Charitable Activities Expenditure (recurrent)	288		305		304		309
Charitable Activities Expenditure (one-off)	59		16		0		0
Conference event costs	50		0		50		0
Donation to Ouset	25		25		25		25
Trading Expenditure	69		69		69		69
Contingency	15		40		40		40
	<b>2166</b>		<b>1999</b>		<b>2048</b>		<b>1965</b>
<b>IN YEAR SURPLUS/-DEFICIT</b>	<b>155</b>		<b>81</b>		<b>-80</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>Cash Reserve Brought Forward</b>	<b>1797</b>		<b>1952</b>		<b>2033</b>		<b>1954</b>
<b>CUMULATIVE OPERATING SURPLUS/-DEFICIT</b>	<b>1952</b>		<b>2033</b>		<b>1954</b>		<b>1956</b>

# Strategy

The Board receive quarterly strategy performance reports from the Association's Head of Strategy and Insight, focusing on specific key performance indicators which support their understanding of service popularity, feedback from students, awareness and engagement as well as retention and support. In addition, they receive regular reports from the elected Officer Trustees, CEO and Groups.

The Trustees were very proud of their 2019-2023 Strategy and a lot was achieved through this. A formal review of the Association strategy was carried out in early 2022, during which time a review was conducted with the Student Leadership Team, Trustees, Students and staff to allow us to develop our new Strategy which launched in September 2023.

Our new strategy focuses on four key strands:

- Create a welcoming environment and champion accessibility for all.
- Increase engagement through evidence-based decision making.
- Enable students to lead, represent and advocate.
- Embrace change to ensure we are future facing and sustainable.

# Schedule of Meetings 2022-2024

- 23 July 2024
- 30 April 2024
- 6 February 2024
- 10 October 2023
- 25 July 2023
- 25 April 2023
- 31 January 2023
- 18 October 2022