

## AHUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

FRIDAY 7th March 2025, 11.00 – 14.30

London, Shakespeare Martineau Offices, Gracechurch Street.

## MINUTES

### Present:

Nicola Owen	John Rushforth
Michaela Boryslawskyj	Mike Shore-Nye
Eileen Schofield	Alistair Jarvis
Rachel Brealey	Richard Taylor
Stephen Dudderidge	Helen Watson
Matthew Andrews	Andrew Young
Paul Greatrix	Niamh Lamond
Louise Nadal	Ben Vulliamy

Online:	
Amanda Wilcox	Helen Galbraith

Apologies: Jim McGeorge,

### 1. Apologies

- 1.1 The Chair passed on apologies from JMcG. The Chair welcomed Alistair Jarvis to his first meeting.

### 2. Minutes

- 2.1 It was requested that the minutes from 6<sup>th</sup> December 2024 be amended to remove HW from the record as being due to sign off the accounts for 2023/4 and to be changed to Treasurer HG
- 2.2 **ACTION 1: BV to amend the December 2024 minutes to ensure HG replaces HW as the signatory for the annual accounts in their role as Treasurer.**
- 2.3 The minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 6th December 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record subject to the amendment of the signatory for the AHUA accounts 2023/4
- 2.4 The Executive Director updated on the following matters arising:
- That the 2023/24 accounts had been signed off by the Treasurer and filled.
  - That the Executive Director has engaged in discussion about overlapping EDI initiatives with the 'Diversity Coalition Group' and is now joining that group to ensure further tie in of AHUA work on EDI research, reciprocal mentoring, bursaries etc as part of their sector wide work.
  - That we have relaunched new action learning sets with online only options and with an association subsidy to grow some of the community building elements for the associations work. That this offer is subsidised by virtue of withdrawing our paid for coaching offer for future new members though we are planning to maintain a list of recommended coaches for members to consider and 'self-serve' commission.
  - That we have now confirmed the appointment for Michaela to the AHUA Secretary and that Alistair Jarvis has been appointed as a co-opted member. It was pointed out that materials to introduce our executive to the membership has been circulated and should be finalised to publish and maintain with any future changes before conference 2025
  - That all other matters arising are covered elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.5 There were no other matters arising.

### 3. Dashboard

- 3.1 The Committee received an updated engagement dashboard. The committee asked for trend data to be built into the report for future years.

3.2 **ACTION 2: BV to add trend data to the engagement dashboard for 2025/26**

### 4. Financial 2024/25 Q2 Accounts

- 4.1 The Treasurer explained that the 2024/5 accounts were now being presented following work on phasing that had not previously been part of the budgeting or reporting on accounts and on forecasting. It was pointed out that forecasting was based on a range of assumptions, particularly as this is implemented for the first time and under a new executive director. ACTION – invoice to be payable July / Aug.
- 4.2 It was pointed out that the budget had targeted a deficit for the year (-£75k) with calculated expenditure from reserve on some key initiatives such as reciprocal mentoring year 2 pilot and the diversity research project along with some subsidy from reserve for Association activities (such as coaching). The current forecasts at the half year suggest the end of year deficit could increase to -£104k with key features for this including a drop in affiliation income, a slight drop in participation on development programmes and some increases in central costs. The potential increased deficit would sit within a tolerance level for our current free cash reserves.
- 4.3 **ACTION 3: Treasurer and Executive Director to develop a revised reserves policy as part of work on the 2025/26 budget**
- 4.4 The Treasurer presented a paper on affiliation fees pointing out a sustained freeze in AHUA institutional membership, the competitive nature of affiliation relative to other professional associations and the tuition fee increase. The paper proposes the increase of the AHUA affiliation fee by £45 to £1,535 per institution per year for 2025/26.
- 4.5 **ACTION 4: BV to add affiliation fee changes to the AGM business for April 2025**

### 5. Reports from liaison meetings and sector relationships

- 5.1 The Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary provided the Executive with an overview of the prior days meetings with UUK, DfE and UKRI pointing out that much of this related to various matters associated with the transformation and efficiency work but also touching on international recruitment, funding and governance and a need to look beyond professional services in isolation in order to leverage the scale of efficiency and transformation required.
- 5.2 The committee offered support for the idea of an organisational maturity assessment development that might be coordinated by AHUA, coproduced with members and external and professional expertise to project manage and which would feed into / complement the UUK task force work and presentations to government but stand alone on an open-source basis.
- 5.3 The Committee were given a brief overview of ongoing dialogue with OfS. It was pointed out that OfS had been unavailable to meet as part of the latest liaison round, cancelling the planned catch up. It was also pointed out that, in a recent online meeting between AHUA and OfS updates on the plans for reporting of the sexual harassment and misconduct survey data. OfS are very determined to publish the data widely; aggregate for the 2025 year and then, following a further survey 2027/28, to report at institutional level for that year and the 2025 year.
- 5.4 It was raised that DfE post 16 reform white paper sets out key priorities and of particular interest is a theme titled 'competition to coordination'. This is a white paper that is designed by DfE to try to influence the HE reform and budget and spending review and perhaps suggests that more radical reform of the OfS funding and regulatory (and CMA) requirements is being considered that would require significant changes to the role of OfS, funding and CMA requirements.

## 6. Scottish HE meetings

6.1 The Chair of the Scottish Secretaries Group provided a verbal report for the Committee noting:

- Early 2026 Scottish government election starting to influence Scottish context (budgets, priorities etc). Uplift previously indicated is now rapidly turning into a cut.
- Pushing hard to try to at least stay still on funding allocations – unlikely to know details till end March. Student recruitment now taking place without full sight of funding arrangements that will accompany which increases risks.
- Funding being made available to support Scottish institutions in crisis is loans rather than grants.
- All political and policy issues feel very ‘up in the air’ till post-election.
- On the surface it looks like some strategy for stability had been forming but beneath the headlines significant uncertainty and challenge remains unresolved.

## 7. Update on AHUA research project

7.1 The Executive Committee were advised that there are now 11 institutions signed up to be part of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the research project and 14 individuals registered so far to be part of the second, focus group and interviews stage (at least 6 more required – grade 6-9 staff). A joint Wonkhe publication had helped secure significant new and wider interest

7.2 The researchers are due to present initial findings and hypothesis to the AHUA Spring Conference

7.3 There is growing interest in the project from a range of academic and non-academic groups. The shifting geopolitical view on DEI has not currently altered the project or raised additional issues which have warranted significant consideration.

7.4 It was pointed out that the second year of the reciprocal mentoring project (RMP) was under way with 20 participants. While this gets very positive feedback from participants, both AHUA members and those mentors of colour, it is anticipated that the outcome of the research project might identify other initiatives that can make a greater impact for 2026 and beyond. On that basis it is anticipated that this may be the final cohort of the RMP under the pilot program which, by the end of 2025 will have allocated £30k from AHUA reserve and have engaged xx delegates across the years (with a 50/50 split of AHUA members and lower grade professional services staff of colour).

## 8. AHUA Development report

8.1 The Committee received a report from AHUA Development association

## 9. AHUA Communications Report

9.1 The committee received a report on the latest communications output and engagement.

9.2 The Communications Group Chair explained that we had been considering a media protocol in order to try to become more responsive to media requests and manage them effectively but that the committee may want to consider devolving more power to the Exec Director, Coms Group and AHUA Chair to manage

9.3 There was strong support for devolving authority to a smaller group to ensure agility and that, where the Executive Director requires, consideration of a member plus the Exec Director had previously proven a useful way to handle interviews.

9.4 **ACTION 5: Communications Group to consider implementation a more streamlined version of the protocol that offers maximum agility. Consideration of other training or support that helps develop a stronger media presence should remain under the Communications groups review.**

**10. Conferences**

- 10.1 The Conference host 2025 gave a verbal update on the plans for the Swansea Spring Conference giving an oversight of the agenda, how costs were being managed for the association and for members. We have now passed 50 delegate registrations. Feedback on the agenda is good but scheduling is tricky for some along with issues of time poverty.
- 10.2 The Executive Director gave a verbal update on plans for Autumn conference, to be hosted at the Open University, and shared the intention to try to secure the new OfS Chair to be involved in the conference and to explore a theme of 'defining the relationship between the University sector, the government, the regulator and the public'.
- 10.3 The Executive Director mentioned that we would be due to start to consider host / venue for the Autumn 2026 conference. The Executive were invited to consider whether AHUA should consider running the conference as a partnership with another sector association or body to try a collaborative approach that might allow us to try working with a different delegate population and spreading the risks of conference operations with another partner. The Executive Director pointed out that Manchester had indicated a willingness to host though they have hosted before and that the Association could consider an alternative venue that we had not used before and / or was topical.
- 10.4 ACTION 6: Ben Vulliamy to explore further the potential of a collaborative conference for September 2026. Update to June 2025 Exec.**

**11. Regional groups**

- 11.1 The committee noted a summary report from the November regional meetings

**12. Membership changes**

- 12.1 The committee noted key changes to its membership and passed thanks to John Rushforth for his support and service as the longest serving members of the AHUA Executive and to the CUC and the sector more broadly.
- 12.2 The committee noted that this was the last meeting of Niamh Lamond as the Conference 2025 host and thanked her for her service and wished her well for the conference. It was noted that Dave Hall (Open University) will be joining the board for June and September meetings in advance of the September conference.

**13. Membership Quota and Criteria**

- 13.1 The Executive Director shared a summary of the indicative preferential vote on possible changes to membership quota and criteria. The poll indicates that a majority of members do support a move to introduce a primary member in order to allow for a softer interpretation of the requirements for a second member that might better accommodate a slightly broader set of roles such as a Deputy Registrar or other roles with specific responsibilities around governance, operations and administration that might not report into the VC. There isn't as strong support for retaining the existing approach or for expanding to 3 members.
- 13.2 The Executive Director pointed out that, if we follow that preference, there are a number of member institutions who will continue to have to limit AHUA membership having changed their structure to introduce a broader range of senior staff (3 or more) supporting aspects of governance, administration and operations. Retaining a limit of 2 members would mean these institutions have to restrict AHUA engagement by selecting a maximum of 2 from their structure to engage. It was pointed out that we could consider whether we increase the range of events and opportunities that we offer beyond the membership, whether, for example, the practice of opening up some development programmes beyond our core membership to 'future members' might expand into future conferences and / or other opportunities.

- 13.3 The Executive Director recommended that we proceed to transition to a preferential member and a slight broadening of reporting requirements for the second member as per the memberships stated preference with a recommendation to Conference. Additionally, that for Autumn conference and 2025/26 Regional meetings and beyond we consider allowing member institutions to send alternatives / additional delegates where the primary member supports this.

- 13.4 **ACTION 7: Ben Vulliamy to advise the membership of the AGM motion to revise membership to retain maximum 2 members, introduce a primary member and soften the reporting requirements for the second member.**

14. **AHUA Constitutional Review**

- 14.1 The Executive Director and Executive Secretary updated the committee on plans for a constitutional review. Primarily designed to update the constitution to reflect consistent language and practice it was explained that it also offered the opportunity to ensure the constitution operates as a high-level document with a standing orders established for more general procedural arrangements. It was intended that there is also room for some consideration of modern best practice, perhaps particularly on election arrangements.

- 14.2 It was explained that the constitution currently requires that an eligible candidate for the role of Chair would serve the Executive for a period of at least year prior to holding that office. It was proposed that this be a critical factor for AHUA to follow when preparing to replace the outgoing Chair and Deputy Chair who are both to finish in April 2026

- 14.3 **ACTION 8: Executive Director and Secretary to continue work on a revised constitution with a view to testing at Executive during 2025 before taking to a future EGM or AGM by Autumn 2026 at latest.**

- 14.4 **ACTION 9: The committee confirmed that the Executive Director and Secretary should prepare to oversee the election of Chair / Deputy Chair roles with interested candidates from within the executive in order to meet the requirement for a new Chair or Deputy to have served the Executive for a period of a year before holding office on the core executive team. Announce intention at AGM 2025**

15. **CUC Governance Commission**

- 15.1 John Rushforth talked about how work had solidified in conversation with DfE and OfS with sometimes differing views about what the future of governance might look like. The proposal was for a piece of work to be driven by the sector, based on facts, perhaps similar in some respects to the UUK task force. JR sees it as England focused initially. JR confirmed that this is to be a CUC led project but that they want to bring in sector partners and may need some support resourcing the project. Advance HE are providing some resource. CUC are talking further with UUK. CUC hope AHUA can facilitate some elements of the project (workshops, data gathering etc). JR explained that they hope it has a focus on if and where governance is a barrier to transformation and change.

- 15.2 A concern was raised about why it was English centric in the first instance. It was suggested that a conversation with Universities Scotland should take place to try to identify the resource necessary to look at governance across all nations from the start. JR said he will feed this back but that it may further need for supporting resource.

- 15.3 There were some concerns raised about the composition of the review group that felt a little imbalanced given a range of government and regulator delegates but, for example, only one AHUA representative. JR confirmed that this draft does include some further updates and that he would circulate the latest draft to the committee. Further feedback could be provided to CUC thereafter.

- 15.4 **ACTION 10: CUC and Ben Vulliamy to circulate latest draft governance commission proposal to Executive Committee. Executive Director to continue to support Advance HE 'Big Conversation' which feeds into the review group. Executive Director to explore further feedback with CUC.**

- 15.5 Thanks was passed to JR to thank him for his commitment and loyalty to the sector. His work on getting the latest thinking together before he ends his CUC role is welcomed and it is hoped AHUA can build upon the foundations he has laid.

### AOB

16.

There was no other business

16.1

The Chair closed the meeting 14.35

16.2

1	Exec Director	BV to amend the December 2024 minutes to ensure HG replaces HW as the signatory for the annual accounts in their role as Treasurer.	2.2	Done
2	Exec Director	BV to add trend data to the engagement dashboard for 2025/26	3.2	Sept 2025
3	Treasurer & Exec Director	HG and BV to develop a revised reserves policy as part of work on the 2025/26 budget	4.3	Sept 2025
4	Exec Director	BV to add affiliation fee changes to the AGM business for April 2025	4.5	April 2025
5	Exec Director and Coms Group	Communications Group to consider implementation a more streamlined version of the protocol that offers maximum agility. Consideration of other training or support that helps develop a stronger media presence should remain under the Communications groups review.	9.4	April 2025
6	Exec Director	BV to explore further the potential of a collaborative conference for September 2026 and update to June Exec	10.4	June 2025
7	Exec Director	BV to advise the membership of the AGM motion to revise membership to retain maximum 2 members, introduce a primary member and soften the reporting requirements for the second member.	13.4	By 17/03/25
8	Exec Director & Secretary	BV and MB to continue work on a revised constitution with a view to testing at Executive during 2025 before taking to a future EGM or AGM by Autumn 2026 at latest.	14.3	2025
9	Exec Director & Secretary	The committee confirmed that the Executive Director and Secretary should prepare to oversee the election of Chair / Deputy Chair roles with interested candidates from within the executive in order to meet the requirement for a new Chair or Deputy to have served the Executive for a period of a year before holding office on the core executive team. Announce intention at AGM 2025	14.4	April 2025 announce election plan
10	Exec Director and CUC	CUC and BV to circulate latest draft governance commission proposal to Executive Committee. BV to continue to support Advance HE 'Big Conversation' which feeds into the review group. BV to explore further feedback with CUC.	15.4	March/April 2025