

AHUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

FRIDAY December 6th 2024, 13.00 – 16.30

ONLINE

MINUTES

Present:

Matthew Andrews	John Rushforth
Michaela Boryslawskyj	Mike Shore-Nye
Lynda Brady	Eileen Schofield
Rachel Brealey	Richard Taylor
Stephen Dudderidge	Helen Watson
Helen Galbraith	Amanda Wilcox
Paul Greatrix	Ben Vulliamy
Niamh Lamond	Andrew Young
Nicola Owen	

Apologies: Jim McGeorge, Louise Nadal

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Jim McGeorge and Louise Nadal

2. Minutes

- 2.1 Helen noted amendment to pension scheme UCEA – not UCU.
- 2.2 The minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 11th September 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record subject to the amendment.
- 2.3 There were no matters arising elsewhere on the agenda.

3. Dashboard

- 3.1 The performance dashboard is intended to become a paper for regular circulation and not for general discussion. Committee members were asked if the format and information was of use.
- 3.2 The report was well received. Future versions need not include individual delegates.

4. Financial accounts 2023/24 and 2024/25 Q1 Accounts

- 4.1 The Treasurer explained that the 2023/24 independently produced accounts had now been completed and showed, as previously forecasted, a deficit for the year within the budgeted deficit and within the tolerance of the Associations reserves. The Committee agreed the accounts as an accurate record.
- 4.2 **ACTION 1: Ben Vulliamy to arrange for the Treasurer to sign and return the 2023/24 accounts.**
- 4.3 On the 2024/25 management accounts reporting to the end of Q1 the Treasurer pointed out that these provide limited modest assurance due to a lack of budget phasing which should be considered for future years. They also show that performance is being monitored and managed with financial risks and controls actively considered to ensure that performance

comes in at or close to the planned budgeted year end deficit and avoid excessive pressure on reserves at the 2024/25 year end. Salary expenditure was up as a result of changes in the AHUA office team composition and circumstances. Current indications are that any overspend at year end will be well within the limits of financial reserves. It was noted that the performance of Spring conference will be key in the final out turn. The management accounts were agreed as an accurate record.

4.4 ACTION 2: Ben Vulliamy should develop budget phasing for 2025/26.

5. Reports from liaison meetings and sector relationships

- 5.1 The Chair provided a brief round up from the AHUA tripartite meeting and liaison meetings with OfS and reported that DfE had cancelled, and that meeting is being rescheduled currently for later December. It was pointed out that we are currently reinstating regular liaison meetings with UKRI and these are due to return in 2025.
- 5.2 The Chair ran through the tripartite meeting confirming that governance and sector finances / government spending priorities, budget and outcome had been the key feature of the tripartite discussion. There had been discussion on the extent to which tuition fee increases would reach institutions or whether contracts would limit this. Discussions also touched on UUK blueprint, data futures / HESA. The Tripartite included confirmation that the search for a permanent OfS chair was underway.
- 5.3 The Chair invited comments from Executive members involved in the OfS Liaison meeting. The meeting had involved some discussions on governance where it was unclear of the extent of the OfS plans on governance but that they had suggested a high degree of dependency on communicating and working with Chairs directly. It was noted that discussions had explored the developments for the sexual misconduct prevalence survey to be delivered alongside the NSS and using the same platform. OfS had been keen to note that non completion of the sexual misconduct prevalence survey would not prevent NSS results being recorded and that they would be reviewing the data integrity before distributing prevalence survey outcomes. AHUA have asked for sector representatives to be involved in testing data, working out how its best used and reducing risks of unintended consequences of the method for implementation OfS has chosen. AHUA reported there's concern about a lack of detail about how prevalence reporting data might be used and distributed.
- 5.4 Executive members who had attended the UUK Liaison meeting reported that this had focused on a range of issues associated with the task force on sector efficiency and transformation. They expect the board to launch week commencing 09/12/2024 and the Chair is now confirmed bringing both sector knowledge and a wider credibility from their experience beyond HE. UUK had briefed further about the expected timeline and key priorities for the spending review and were clear that a future annual uplift to fees linked to inflation was a key target along with other funding that might be linked to research and development, industrial strategy, transformation agendas or more. UUK had also flagged that they anticipate interest from the government about students as consumers and will look to have further conversations with AHUA about this once they know more about the direction of thinking from DfE.
- 5.5 Executive Committee members thanked the core executive for their work on engaging with sector bodies. Executive Committee members noted that an exploration of alternative models of governance should perhaps reach beyond the NHS (which OfS have mentioned as an alternative approach) and that developing a sense of how the sector can own the agenda would be prudent.
- 5.6 CUC reported back on discussions with OfS and how there is some scepticism about the quality of external reviews of governance. CUC felt OfS had a more strategic interest in governance and that they should return to these discussions in the new year. The OfS have commissioned an external consultant to look at other sectors. CUC are also trying to arrange some exercises with DfE. They have tried to reach out to the minister but not had any reply.

5.7 The Committee suggested AHUA should consider presenting ourselves as a coordination group for developing out the collaborative efficiency initiatives that are of a suitable scope.

5.8 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy to consider an AHUA collaborative development project group as a follow up to the work started at regional meetings to launch in the New Year**

6. Scottish HE meetings

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

Scotland may offer some case studies on governance interventions and the difference between business model challenges and governance challenges.

Scotland is experiencing continued and growing financial squeeze on fees in Scotland, unlikely to know details of the full extent of impact until late March.

College sector in Scotland continues to be even more lean than the HE sector.

Changes to fees for the 'rest of UK' students apply but contracts might limit the impact (similar to the England challenge).

7. Update on AHUA research project

7.1 The Chair of the Research Reference Group provided a verbal update for the Committee confirming that Nottingham Business School had now agreed a contract for the research and data sharing agreements were in a final draft stage. The literary review and desk-based research was well underway and we are due to start issuing the call out for participation in the second stage of the research in the new year. This will be seeking both institutions willing to share their relevant institutional data and individuals offering to be part of interviews and focus groups.

7.2 The Committee also received an update on the Higher Diversity Coalition group from the AHUA representative to that group. It was pointed out that:

The HDC was convened by Gatenby Sanderson with a range of sector bodies.

Project designed to tackle a lack of diversity in leadership in a range of student facing services (student and academic services in particular).

Interest in story telling about pathways and experiences, data, recruitment processes and staff development.

May be helpful for us to report back to the group on our research project and the reciprocal mentoring project.

7.3 **ACTION: HW and AY to draw together some of the themes around recruitment, diversity and practice.**

8. AHUA Development report

8.1 The Committee was updated on key work on AHUA development programs and initiatives by the Chair of the Development group. They advised on a proposal to transition over the course of 2024/25 away from the current level of investment into coaching for some AHUA members and towards a sustained and open to all subsidised action learning set participation. It was anticipated that this move would build on the Association's community building role, be more transparent and accessible to all and could be more financially sustainable. It was proposed that the Association would still signpost 'preferred coaching partners' to members and encourage members to secure support of their organisation for independent use of coaching.

8.2 It was noted that a more themed approach to ALS would be designed for 2025/26. The Committee supported the proposal.

8.3 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy and AHUA Office team to re-launch action learning in January 2025 and prepare to phase out the coaching offer. Ensure the inclusion of online ALS options for January 2025**

9. AHUA Communications Report

- 9.1 The Chair of the Communications group invited the Committee to provide any feedback or comment on a proposal to merge the Communications group with the Blog group and reformat the membership and purpose of the Communications group to try to secure consistent and high-quality outcomes on blogging, web development, surveying and communicating our impact. The Committee agreed to the proposed change and thanked the Communications group for their progress report.
- 9.2 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy and AHUA office team to arrange for recruitment to the newly merged Communication and Blog group and schedule meetings for the 2025 year.**

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. Ticketing and final conference schedule should launch late January 2025.

11. Regional groups

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

12. Membership changes

- 12.1 The committee thanked Stephen Duddridge for staying on for another term as the Chair of the communications and Blog group.
- 12.2 The committee noted their thanks to Paul Greatrix for his service to AHUA and the sector.
- 12.3 The Chair explained that Michaela Boryslawskyj has expressed an interest in the vacancy for Honorary Secretary. The Chair invited members to contact the Executive Director if they wished to express an interest in being considered for the vacancy. If there is more than one candidate the Chair and Executive Director would consider an appropriate selection process and otherwise MB will be welcomed to the role.
- 12.4 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy to remind committee members of deadline for nominations to the Honorary Secretary role.**

13. Organisational development

- 13.1 The Executive Director set out a number of elements of the paper showing key short- and longer-term opportunities for the Association to grow income that would better allow us to meet growing operating costs and showing the balance between membership fees, participating in development programs, participating in conferences, generating commercial income or reducing central operating costs.
- 13.2 The Committee confirmed the transition away from fully paid coaching to Action Learning Sets was wise from both an economic point of view and from a community building and equity of participation position. The Committee encouraged prioritisation of commercial income.
- 13.3 On increases to membership fee, it was noted that a recommendation would go to AGM were this to change and that a small working group might review before bringing back any proposal to the next Executive Committee. The Committee noted that, in the current operating and economic context we should avoid dependency on fee income over and above 3% which sits close to inflation and the tuition fee increase. The Committee talked a little about how such an increase could effectively be communicated. Members indicated a reluctance to consider changes to the single membership rate regardless of size. The Committee noted consideration of associate membership options might be beneficial.

- 13.4 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy to convene a small group to explore options for changes to membership fee and bring draft options to the next Executive Committee meeting.**

14. Membership quota and Criteria

- 14.1 The Executive Director gave a short summary of the consultation so far on possible changes to membership quota and criteria. It was pointed out that support for the three available options is split but understanding of that range of interests and options is perhaps growing. The consultation is also helping the Association to understand the key reservations and concerns and mitigate these with whichever option we proceed with.
- 14.2 The Executive Director reminded the Executive Committee that, whichever outcome the Association were to proceed with will help unlock future strategic development based on a clearer understanding of who our membership community is. The proposed next step is to produce a membership update helping them to understand the range of opinions and the rationale for change and to launch an indicative preferential vote alongside that update. That data should come back to the next Executive Committee meeting for the Committee to agree a proposal to be put to the members at the AGM.
- 14.3 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy to draft a membership blog on membership consultation. An indicative preferential survey to be launched with members on the existing 3 options before the New Year. Summary of feedback and preferential vote outcome to come back to the next Executive Committee along with a recommendation to take to AGM**

15 Alison Johns (Advance HE) join the meeting

- 15.1 Advance HE CEO Alison Johns (AJ) joined the meeting. AJ ran through a few slides:
The new Advance HE Strategy runs to 2030 with transformation being a key driver. There are 3 key themes A) Maximise member impact and value, B) Support leadership, management and governance, C) Develop educational excellence. They are particularly keen to come back and talk to AHUA in the new year about ways that Advance HE is looking to reduce costs to the sector.
Member benefits – AJ talked through key aspects of membership benefit
Member dashboard - AJ showcased examples of the benefits institutions can secure (and monitor) as part of working with Advance HE.
Approach to EDI – launching in the new year Advance HE intends to roll out a new approach that draws together toolkits and good practice awards into a single institutional framework. The approach will be modular.
Collaboration – Advance HE is keen to collaborate with AHUA on governance in particular.
- 15.2 **ACTION: Ben Vulliamy and AHUA Office team to add Advance HE slides to the AHUA membership resources pages.**
- 15.3 Executive Committee members commended the merged charter mark that accommodates consideration of intersectionality and is perhaps easier to manage.
- 15.4 AJ briefly ran through how a product portfolio review identified a range of less high profile and more tailored initiatives which have been wound up as part of the strategy.
- 15.5 There was interest in governance and recognition that AHUA and Advance HE should follow up further on the sector interest and wider public narrative and sector bodies narrative on this issue.
- 15.6 The Executive thanked AJ for presenting.

16. CUC and Governance discussion

- 16.1 CUC Deputy CEO Amanda Oliver joined the meeting

- 16.2 The CUC CEO and Deputy CEO ran through some slides sharing details of some of the work historically done to define what good looks like in UK HE governance and identified a lack of clarity about what specifically it is that others might be looking to (OfS, DfE, etc).
- 16.3 CUC explained that they are piloting a 'single issue framework' setting out key headings of issues governors need to consider in regard to student mental health.
- 16.4 CUC recognised there is an interest in systemised template / case studies of what key resources / reports etc board currently use. This helps avoid boards reinventing wheels and raises a minimum standard of compliance
- 16.5 CUC summarised some of the issues related to stakeholder messaging and the extent to which external stakeholders will perhaps inevitably focus on new stories of where governance fails rather than the stories of where it's robust, forward looking, steering change effectively etc.
- 16.6 CUC summarised the concern that OfS might start to look at quality assurance work on HE governance which could be difficult for the sector and might design interventions based on a particular perspective of the issues and how university governance works. CUC shared a summary of some of the future issues that the sector could consider and explore including the role of technology, research and evidence of what works / what great governance looks like, debating different models of governance (such as Cortex board governance model, generative model, advisory model, Management team model).
- 16.7 The Executive Committee thanked CUC for the slides and agreed that there is positive work to be done both on supporting existing governance practice and supporting sector thinking about the future of governance. The Executive Committee shared an interest in the relationship between Board and Executive (which they felt was not well understood by some sector bodies). There is a concern that sometimes people talk about governance but actually are talking about the board.
- 16.8 It was pointed out that we find ourselves in a moment where there's an ambition for the sector to do something more dynamic. This could be perceived as a challenge or an opportunity.
- 16.9 **ACTION: AHUA to liaise with CUC to explore how we support the review of the code and CUC's work where we can help with the work or its role out.**
- 17 **AOB**
- 17.1 There was no other business
- 17.2 The Chair closed the meeting 14.35

ACTIONS				
	Person/s	Action	Agenda item no	Deadline
1.	Ben Vulliamy and Helen Watson	2023/24 accounts to be signed and filed.	4.2	31/12/2024
2.	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to prepare budget phasing for 2025/26 budget	4.5	May 2025
3.	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to consider an AHUA collaborative development project group as a follow up to the work started at regional meetings to launch in the New Year	5.8	January 2025

4.	Helen Watson and Andrew Young	Helen Watson and Andrew Young to draw together some of the themes around recruitment, diversity and practice. Updates, where relevant, to the Higher Diversity Coalition and the Diversity Research Project.	7.3	February 2025
5	Ben Vulliamy & AHUA office team	Ben Vulliamy and AHUA Office team to re-launch action learning sets in January 2025 and prepare to phase out the coaching offer. Ensure the inclusion of online ALS options for January 2025	8.3	January 2025
6	Ben Vulliamy & AHUA office team	Ben Vulliamy and AHUA office team to arrange for recruitment to the newly merged Communication and Blog group and schedule meetings for year ahead.	9.2	December 2024
7	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to remind committee members of call for nominations for any other candidates interested in the Honorary Secretary role. Nominations by 13 th December	12.4	06/12/2024
8	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to convene a small group to explore options for changes to membership fee and bring draft options to the next Executive Committee meeting.	13.4	March 2025
9	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to draft a membership blog on membership consultation. An indicative preferential survey to be launched with members on the existing 3 options before the New Year. Summary of feedback and preferential vote outcome to come back to the next Executive Committee along with a recommendation to take to AGM	14.3	December 2024
10	Ben Vulliamy and AHUA office team	Ben Vulliamy and AHUA Office team to add Advance HE slides to the AHUA membership resources pages.	15.2	December 2024
11	Ben Vulliamy	AHUA to liaise with CUC to explore how we support the review of the code and CUC's work where we can help with the work or its role out.	16.9	January 2025

Ben Vulliamy December 2024