

AHUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY September 12th 2024, 13.00 – 16.30

IN PERSON – University of East London. University Square Stratford Building.

MINUTES

Present:

Nicola Owen
John Rushforth
Rachel Brealey
Richard Taylor
Helen Watson
Amanda Wilcox (Online)

Michaela Boryslawskyj
Sophie Bowen
Jim McGeorge
Helen Galbraith
Paul Greatrix
Ben Vulliamy

Apologies: Niamh Lamond, Mike Shore-Nye, Andrew Young, Stephen Dudderidge, Matthew Andrews, Lynda Brady, Eileen Schofield, Louise Nadal.

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Niamh Lamond, Mike Shore-Nye, Andrew Young, Stephen Dudderidge, Matthew Andrews, Lynda Brady, Eileen Schofield and Louise Nadal. Amanda Wilcox joined online.
- 1.2 Rachel Brealey was welcomed to her first meeting.
- 1.3 Ben Vulliamy was welcomed to his first meeting.

2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the Executive Committee meeting on 7 June 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record.
- 2.2 On matters arising Ben Vulliamy reported that:
 - Correspondence had been sent to Advance HE to share some feedback on a recent 'provocation' published by AHE relating to Professional Services which AHUA had been asked to respond to. A follow up meeting is scheduled with AHE Chief Exec Alison Johns for October 2nd with the Executive Director
 - Membership invoices were sent out Aug 9th with 30 days payment period not yet concluded. 87 payments had been received by Sept 11th.
 - A freelance contract has been agreed to cover the Communications Officer maternity leave period giving them and the Association some flexibility. Handover will start beginning October before the maternity leave commences late October.
 - A date has been secured to meet with JISC to explore its data strategy. AHUA delegates include Steve Denton, Rob Sykes, Sophie Bowen, Ester Ruskuc, Lucinda Parr.
- 2.3 On the Advance HE discussion it was reported to members that an Advance HE Working Group over the previous year including 2 AHUA Executive Committee representatives had been developing a report 'Measuring What Matters'. It was noted that Advance HE is now approving the final draft with relevant stakeholders from AHUA, UUK and CUC with a view to publishing week commencing 16th September. It was reported Advance HE is keen to confirm the final report with AHUA support.

- 2.4 It was acknowledged that the final work had perhaps strayed a little from an earlier brief but that it should still hold some value for some governing bodies.
- 2.5 It was pointed out that the report introduction stated that it used research of English and Australian universities, but that Edinburgh was a frequently used case study. It was agreed to feed this back to AHE along with some other general comments and notes from Committee members.
- 2.6 **ACTION 1:** Ben Vulliamy to confirm to Advance HE that the use of the AHUA logo was approved for the final report and that further feedback on the draft document from AHUA representatives would be shared

3. Finance and 2024/25 Budget

- 3.1 The Treasurer explained that the 2022/23 accounts had been circulated having been reviewed by an independent external accountant along with some internal audit to provide a degree of confidence. That process had caused a significant delay in publication and distribution which should not be the case moving forward. The 2023/24 accounts will be available for the December 2024 Executive.
- 3.2 An internal summary of the performance 2023/24 (prior to full accounts) suggests the actual out-turn came in with a deficit less than budgeted. The deficit is expected to be -£22,390 against an original budget of -£57,500.
- 3.3 The Treasurer invited Ben Vulliamy to talk through the implications for the 2024/25 and future budgets. Ben talked through the drop in membership income in 2024/25 (-£13,410), the increasing staffing costs (due to maternity pay and the move to Executive Director role), the future planned commitment of spend from reserves (to the research commission and a further round of free to use reciprocal mentoring) and the increase in some overheads (such as the creation of bursaries or the increased digital communications costs) while we try to hold engagement and participation fees for the majority of conferences, events and development. All of this would mean some manageable pressure on 2024/25 budget and the need for some consideration for how we might make adjustments for the 2025/26 year and beyond.
- 3.4 Ben pointed out that changes for the future in order to avoid excessive and longer term dependency on reserve or overspend beyond budget could include: changes to membership fees (which have not had any increase for several years); changes to conference and / or development program costs which are increasingly lean and, if attendance drops off, would be widely subsidised at lower participation levels; increased use of sponsorship or reducing overheads.
- 3.5 On membership subscription Ben Vulliamy pointed out £1,490 is a competitive subscription level in comparison with other HE professional associations who commonly charge more. The Committee was advised that the majority of other HE associations have variable fee models dependent on institutional turnover or similar and this approach could be one option considered for the future. Any change to membership fees would need to be considered by the Executive Committee before going to AGM at Spring Conference to be approved for implementation the following year. Changes to membership fee should be tied in with work on maximising engagement and benefits of membership.
- 3.6 On sponsorship income some Committee members felt that there was significant sponsorship income seen at other sector conferences that didn't seem to be as prominent at AHUA and yet might commonly sit under AHUA portfolios. BUFDG and AUDE were cited as examples. Ben Vulliamy agreed that the sponsorship and marketing strategy was modest. One factor to consider was that this could have been with a view to avoid negative impact on delegate experience and any change would have to be managed to avoid damaging delegate experience.
- 3.7 **ACTION 2:** It was agreed that Ben Vulliamy should bring an income development paper to the next Executive Committee meeting December 2024.
- 3.8 Members approved the 2022/23 accounts.

3.9 Members agreed the 2023/24 report as an accurate summary pending full accounts at December Executive.

3.10 **ACTION 3:** The AHUA 2032/24 final accounts to come to December 2024 board meeting.

4. Items to be discussed with guest speakers

4.1 Members raised items that would later be discussed with guest speaker Raj Jethwa. It was agreed that getting a clear sense on the current status of the pay negotiations, pensions issues and industrial relations were key.

5. Liaison meetings and sector relationships

5.1 The liaison meeting dates were noted.

5.2 The Chair ran the Committee through recent dialogue with OfS including with the Interim Chair, Sir David Behan, at the beginning of September. It was pointed out that the appointment was interim for a period of maximum 10 months and that the appointment is seen by some as representing an endorsement of his report and its recommendations. Sir David has been constructive in discussions and stresses a desire to focus the regulatory portfolio much more onto matter related to financial security and less on other areas, wants to change the tone of dialogue with the sector to be more on regulation through a constant improvement for all lens, that he recognises OfS currently lack some of the key competencies they require moving forward but that he is also looking to the sector to show similar willingness to engage and show leadership on its own key agendas. The Chair pointed out that Sir David had shared key observations about the governance and leadership space and how Universities would need to sharpen their attention and approach in that area.

5.3 John Rushforth confirmed CUC are due to meet with him in the coming month and will be seeking for him to define his challenge on governance to be clear about the concerns he has or the problems he thinks need solving. He stated that there are significant examples of good practice in governance and that he's keen for the best practice to be recognised and used as an exemplar as much as the poorer examples. He also pointed out that the Code of Practice may need to be reviewed and that he would be willing to explore further discussion events about the issue.

5.4 John Rushforth suggested that an essay competition, perhaps jointly sponsored by some key parties, might solicit some positive engagement about the future of governance and decision making.

5.5 Committee members supported the idea of an essay competition. Some members of the Committee felt there are still misapprehensions Sir David holds about the sector and that there needs to be greater recognition that change in organisations is now swift. It was felt that there wasn't yet a full recognition of how engagement has improved or not and that change in tone needs to be matched by a change in the quality of dialogue and action. Some Committee members reported that they still felt there is a default to blame and this can detract from personal reflection. The Committee were keen for the sectors diversity and breadth of experience and practice to be better recognised by OfS.

5.6 Members shared that the existing governance code remains a robust piece of work that with some updating and widespread adoption will solve some of the concerns about governance and decision making without reinventing new resources or activity on governance. John agreed and talked to using existing reassurances better in order to reassure the sector. He gave the example of the assurance documents to chairs from auditors perhaps being produced for OfS.

5.7 The Chair explained that the Executive Officers were currently reviewing comments from UUK on the Behan report recommendations with a final version of the thoughts due to be sent to DfE week/commencing 16th October. The Chair summarised key themes from that such as that legislation may not be appropriate or necessary, that there are concerns with increasing consumer protection enforcement powers of OfS, particularly as some institutions operate leaner operating models, that student contracts are already well established in the sector, that student voice should leverage students' unions in institutions as well as national bodies / students directly. The Committee recorded their thanks

to the Chair for leading on some important dialogue with OfS and the sector bodies. The Chair recorded their thanks to all members who contribute to consultations and managing sector relationships.

5.8 **ACTION 4:** John Rushforth to update AHUA Executive following CUC discussions with OfS to define the challenge and opportunity relating to governance.

5.9 **ACTION 5:** Ben Vulliamy to update the feedback to UUK on Behan Report recommendations following Executive discussion to inform their discussions with DfE

6. Scottish HE Update

6.1 The Committee was provided an update on Scottish HE issues. It was noted that funding gaps were widening in Scotland and a half billion cut to pay for public sector was a sign of more economic pressure to come and a growing funding black hole that means the forward look is perhaps worse still. A review of teaching methodology is due to look at funding allocations. A review of funding providers and methodology may lead to a merger of funding bodies.

6.2 The Committee was advised that homelessness and housing including student housing is a key focus for Scottish Parliament.

6.3 It was noted that QAA Scotland had seen significant change in directors in October.

7. Update on AHUA research project

7.1 The Committee was updated by the Executive Director that Nottingham Trent Business School had been selected as the partner for the AHUA research into barriers for people of colour in professional services. The Committee was advised that the appointment panel had prioritised the proposals who, as well as showing an independent rigour for research and a positive partnership approach, were focused on creating and disseminating practical outcomes focused specifically on AHUA members.

7.2 The Committee was advised that finalising the brief had taken longer than originally expected and as a result the tender process started late. This does mean securing the research outcomes and full report / dissemination plan ready for Spring Conference may prove too much and that it may the Spring Conference includes preliminary findings or progress report and can include conference members in exploring how the research findings might develop into resources and tangible outputs that our members can use. The Committee acknowledged that the Spring conference would be unlikely to receive full and final research findings.

7.3 The Chair recorded her thanks to Andrew Young for chairing the process so far and the staff and associates who supported that process.

8. AHUA Development report

8.1 The Committee noted the development report and the implementation of two bursaries of £2k each for people of colour on the Aspiring Registrars and COO's program.

8.2 The Executive noted that we would need to continue to be mindful of cost barriers to participation.

9. AHUA Communications Report

9.1 The written report on AHUA's recent communication activities was received and noted.

9.2 The Committee briefly discussed the work to start to change the approach to position papers, trying to develop them as outputs to Exchange meetings in future. They welcomed the work to try out something different.

10. Raj Jethwa, UCU joined the meeting online

- 10.1 The Chair welcomed Raj and thanked him for joining the Executive Committee.
- 10.2 Raj Jethwa presented a series of slides setting out the status of UCEA engagement with the sector and trade unions on issues of collective bargaining.
- 10.3 The Chair thanked Raj for the presentation and felt that it answered some of the key questions that members of the Committee had discussed prior to him joining. In particular;
- That the pay deal was not agreed but was to be implemented without agreement.
 - That UCU do now accept that the sector does not have significant spending capacity.
 - That the UCU are preparing a new DC pension scheme for the sector which they expect to be ready for enrolment where an institution so chooses, from summer 2025. Almost 50 HEI's have expressed interest so far.
 - That agreement with UCU on aspects of pay bargaining was strong on the associated aspects of negotiation that were adjacent to the core salary issue.
 - That any suggestion of further fragmentation of the sector (into nations / mission groups etc) was not being considered currently.
 - A summary of the breadth and scale of restructures shared with UCEA confirmed 37 redundancy registers currently had 2825 employees registered at risk across the sector.
- 10.4 The Committee asked about the probability of industrial action and Raj talked through scenarios and ballot processes pointing out that appetite in institutions and politics that might influence decisions, including differences between the main unions. Any ballots would be likely to follow UNISON's ballot to a similar timescale (with results just before Christmas).
- 10.5 The Committee asked whether many institutions were considering deferment on pay. It was reported that half a dozen are actively considering and a further half dozen have not ruled it out.
- 10.6 The Committee enquired about the extent to which recurring disputes meant we might never get to a resolution on pay spine compression. Raj confirmed that UCEA agree pay spine compression cannot continue as it is, given the National Living Wage increases are pushing the lowest pay spine points making progression very challenging.
- 10.7 The Committee asked whether UCEA saw evidence of institutions and unions wanting to wrap up pay and pensions issues together in packages. Raj replied that while pay and pensions need to be viable to each other the separation of negotiation on these two issues needs to remain.
- 10.8 The Committee asked about how government changes and public sector pay issues would influence any HE pay dispute. Raj answered that he thought while people will point to settlements for teachers and other parts of the public sector, the government doesn't want to have disputes and / or to enter into a period of frequent pay disputes. Subsequently they may encourage constructive talks mindful of the sectors operating context.
- 10.9 The Chair thanked Raj for joining the AHUA executive. Raj left the meeting

11. Future conferences

- 11.1 The dates of future conferences were received and noted.
- 11.2 The Committee noted that the reference group for Spring Conference 2025 would be meeting in October.
- 11.3 The Chair invited discussion on the EGM motion regarding an increase to three members per institution while retaining the existing characteristics and criteria for an individual member.

- 11.4 The Committee acknowledged the challenge of retaining a core membership who were operating with a similar level of resource responsibility and proximity to decision making and being concerned about how increases in the number of individual members might see increasing diversity in the types of roles which might need further consideration.
- 11.5 Discussion followed on possible ways of increasing the number of individual members while retaining some consistency, fairness between institutions and the possibility of leaving some decision-making power with a lead member at each institution. It was pointed out that, these approaches would require alternative wording for the constitution and that any changes to the constitution had to be circulated to members 28 days in advance of being put to a members' meeting at AGM or EGM.
- 11.6 The Chair proposed that the EGM motion be withdrawn from Autumn Conference pending consultation with members on what membership criteria would apply to reflect the issues raised in terms of multiple membership up to 3 individual members.
- 11.7 **ACTION 6:** Chair / Executive Officers to update the membership at the EGM on the intention to withdraw the motion until a later date.
- 11.8 **ACTION 7:** Ben Vulliamy to organise consultation on membership criteria that might accompany an increase to 3 members per institution. Update for the December Executive Committee.

12. Regional Groups

- 12.1 There were no specific updates on regional groups
- 12.2 The dates for the next regional meetings were noted by the Committee.

13. Executive Committee issues

- 13.1 Details of the Executive Committee membership were received and noted.
- 13.2 Rachel Brealey has joined the Executive Committee for a three-year term as a Nationally Elected Member.
- 13.3 Rachel Sandby-Thomas has stood down from the Executive as of 31st August after serving 2 years of a 3 year term.
- 13.4 It has been approved for Helen Galbraith to continue for a second three-year term as Honorary Treasurer until 31st August 2027.
- 13.5 The dates for future Executive Committee meetings were noted.

14. Membership

- 14.1 The Executive Committee discussed the small number of recent membership withdrawals and the implications of these. Discussion focussed on both membership affordability / value for money and membership data and intelligence. Some discussion was also had on possible initiatives to address issues and reduce membership attrition.
- 14.2 It was pointed out that, were the Committee to resolve to implement a tiered membership pricing approach with, for example, a £100m turnover bar to split larger and smaller institutions then 26 of our current membership institutions would fall into the smaller university bracket. Notably, of the members who had left summer 2024 only 2 of them had turnover below £100m.
- 14.3 The Chair stressed that membership engagement is key to membership value for money and retention and that we needed to do more to understand and monitor membership engagement. The Committee noted that being explicit about AHUA influencing work might demonstrate value for money further.

15.1 **Any Other Business**

- 15.2 The Chair invited Ben Vulliamy to share some reflections on his induction and first 50 days in the role.
- 15.3 The Executive Director explained that perceptions around membership diversity varied and that, while some AHUA members were anxious of the growing diversity amongst institutions and AHUA roles, often external partners reported valuing the diversity of view / experience AHUA makes when making representations to, for example, Advance HE, OfS, JISC, UUK.
- 15.4 It was pointed out that dependency on volunteers was both a strength and a weakness for the association. The generosity of membership volunteers is critical to the functioning of the Association, an important feature of conference and workshops, of blogging and of our representations to external bodies. It complements the AHUA's relatively lean staff and associate team and finances as well as giving an authenticity and credibility to our work. However, it also means we can become dependent on a small core, perhaps excessively at times, some partners have commented that it can slow down decision making (with perhaps excessive use of steering groups and forums of members to support projects or work that might often be considered business as usual and staff led in other organisations).
- 15.5 The Executive Director mentioned that consideration of a CRM and / or a data strategy would not be a top priority this year but could be very important for AHUA's future and would help us develop membership engagement systems and align data sources better.

ACTIONS				
	Person/s	Action	Agenda item no	Deadline
1.	Ben Vulliamy and Helen Watson	Ben Vulliamy to confirm to Advance HE that the use of the AHUA logo was approved for the final report and that further feedback on the draft document from AHUA representatives would be shared	2.6	16/09/2024
2.	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to table an income development paper at the next Executive Board meeting December 2024.	3.7	06/12/2024
3.	Ben Vulliamy and Helen Galbraith	The AHUA 2022/24 final accounts to come to December 2024 board meeting.	3.10	06/12/2024
4.	John Rushforth	John Rushforth to update AHUA Executive following discussions with OfS to define the challenge and opportunity relating to governance.	5.9	06/12/2024
5	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to update the feedback to UUK on Behan recommendations following Executive discussion to inform their discussions with DfE	5.10	13/09/2024
6	Nicola Owen	Chair / Exec to update the membership at the EGM on the intention to withdraw the motion until a later date.	11.7	13/09/2024
7	Ben Vulliamy	Ben Vulliamy to organise consultation on membership criteria that might accompany an increase to 3 members per institution. Update for December Executive Committee	11.8	13/09/2024