

Trustee Board Meeting – Minutes

Date: Tue 18 Nov 2025

Trustee Board Meeting Time: 1 – 2pm

Venue: 5.20 Senate House and online

Trustee Members - Full-Time Officers

Ella Lovibond (EL)	Sport & Student Development Officer
Jessie Yeung (JY)	International Students Officer (P, C & EDI Co-Chair)
Katie Poyner (KP)	Union Affairs Officer
Linlu Ye (LY)	Equality, Access and Liberation Officer
Lucy Pears (LPe)	Student Living Officer
Mia Stevens (MS)	Undergraduate Education Officer
Sharan Khemlani (SK)	Postgraduate Education Officer

Trustee Members – Student Trustees

Ismail Zarif (IZ)	Student Trustee
Kreeshi Shavdia (KS)	Student Trustee (FARG Co-Chair)
Shubham Kulkarni (SKu)	Student Trustee
Varenya Mehrotra (VM)	Student Trustee (Trustee Board Co-Chair)

Trustee Members – Co-opted/Nominated Trustees

Allan Allison (AA)	Co-opted Trustee (FARG Co-Chair)
Helen West (HW)	Co-opted Trustee
Shraddha Chaudhary (SCh)	Co-opted Trustee
Steph Harris (SH)	Co-opted Trustee (Trustee Board Co-Chair)
Lucinda Parr (LP)	Nominated Trustee (P, C & EDI Co-Chair)

In Attendance

Ben Pilling (BP)	Chief Executive
Suzanne Doyle (SD)	Governance and L&D Manager and Clerk
Hannah Khan (HK)	Governance and Complaints Administrator
Christy O'Sullivan (CO'S)	Director of Student Opportunities and Community
Paul Arnold (PA)	Director of Marketing, Communications, Events and Business Development
Keith Feeney (KF)	University Legal Contact

Please remember that these papers and discussions are confidential within the trustees and staff at the meeting.

Agenda items needing approval by People, Culture & EDI Committee and FARG Committee go to the full trustee board for approval.

All the papers are in the **Trustee Meetings folder** on the Trustee SharePoint site as well as in the agenda items below.

No	Item	Lead
STANDING ITEMS		
1	Welcome, Introductions and Apologies	Chair

1.1	Trustees NOTED the welcome and introductions from the Chair Varenya Mehrotra (VM).	
1.2	Trustees NOTED trustee members present:	
Ella Lovibond (EL)	Sport & Student Development Officer	
Jessie Yeung (JY)	International Students Officer (P, C & EDI Co-Chair)	
Katie Poyner (KP)	Union Affairs Officer	
Linlu Ye (LY)	Equality, Access and Liberation Officer	
Lucy Pears (LPe)	Student Living Officer	
Mia Stevens (MS)	Undergraduate Education Officer	
Sharan Khemlani (SK)	Postgraduate Education Officer	
Ismail Zarif (IZ)	Student Trustee	
Kreeshi Shavdia (KS)	Student Trustee (FARG Co-Chair)	
Shubham Kulkarni (SKu)	Student Trustee	
Varenya Mehrotra (VM)	Student Trustee (Trustee Board Co-Chair)	
Allan Allison (AA)	Co-opted Trustee (FARG Co-Chair)	
Helen West (HW)	Co-opted Trustee	
Shraddha Chaudhary (SCh)	Co-opted Trustee	
Steph Harris (SH)	Co-opted Trustee (Trustee Board Co-Chair)	
1.3	Trustees NOTED those in attendance present:	
Ben Pilling (BP)	Chief Executive	
Hannah Khan (HK)	Governance and Complaints Administrator	
Christy O'Sullivan (CO'S)	Director of Student Opportunities and Community	
Paul Arnold (PA)	Director of Marketing, Communications, Events and Business Development	
Keith Feeney (KF)	University Legal Contact	
1.4	Trustees NOTED apologies from Lucinda Parr (LP) and Suzanne Doyle (SD).	
1.5	Trustees NOTED the meeting was recorded for the purpose of those not able to attend and to support the minutes. The recording would be deleted in 14 days.	
1.6	Trustees DECLARED no other business.	
2	Register and Declarations of Interests	Chair
2.1	Trustees RECEIVED and NOTED the Register of Interests. One conflict was related to the Register of Interest at FARG on 22 Oct 2025 as Steph Harris (SH) noted she is an Honorary Life Member which is a type of Associate Member.	
2.2	Trustees DECLARED that no new interests have arisen or corrections are needed on the register.	
2.3	Trustees DECLARED a conflict related to the agenda item. SH reiterated that she is an Honorary Life Member as noted on the agenda. She was reminded she could excuse herself from discussions if she felt she needed to.	
3	Associate Membership	BP

	<p>3.1 Trustees RECEIVED a paper regarding Associate Memberships, in relation to a motion which went to Student Council in Nov 2025, to agree next steps and make a decision.</p> <p>3.2 The paper was drafted after Student Council and went to the staff and officer working group for input. The events leading to this point were summarized: a few years ago, a sporting group raised concerns about how the SU was handling conduct issues, leading to a Code of Conduct review which made over 40 recommendations including reviewing Associate Membership as a high-risk area. The board agreed to prioritise it and as there was no staff capacity to carry out the review, trusted partners at Atkinson HR were asked to do it.</p> <p>3.3 The concerns Associate Membership raises are still valid and are no less of a risk now. The concerns include not knowing who they are so not having appropriate safeguards, not having a suitable process to manage misconduct, impacts on student leadership, and concerns about insurance and our charitable purpose. Since changes were announced, the SU has worked to bring in mitigations such as the coach and instructor scheme and the safety training fund.</p> <p>3.4 The SU doesn't want to conflict with Student Council or create distrust and frustration amongst students, but this has to be weighed against the serious concerns the changes sought to address. It's important to reflect on the process to avoid a situation like this again. There is no solution which can solve both the reputational harm and the risk concerns. Some student leaders are distrustful of the SU while others are frustrated by the process and transparency, this links to other frustrations around the introduction of mandatory trip registrations and risk assessment changes. Although reputational harm has occurred, it's difficult to quantify, and the hope is that, with our support, groups will be able to cope with the changes and continue to thrive, and the level of resistance will reduce.</p> <p>3.5 The recommendations focus on repairing reputational harm, making positive changes operationally to improve student group leaders' experiences, and getting to the end point of Associate Membership changes. This way the SU hopes to move forward to positive working and rebuilding relationships.</p> <p>3.6 Trustees thanked those who had worked on the changes. They acknowledged that although it was a difficult decision, most thought it was still the right one. Student sentiment and the reputational harm done should be acknowledged when moving forwards with the changes. There will be a lot to reflect on with the process.</p> <p>3.7 Trustees noted the bar is very high for the board to do something Student Council has expressed a view against. They felt this case meets the criteria of having too much risk to continue. This is an important issue, and the decision hasn't been made easily. Trustees felt it was important to communicate that this decision had not been taken lightly but had been done due to the ongoing risk of potential harm.</p> <p>3.8 The supervising trustee shared their experience of overseeing complaints, noting there have been some really serious situations with Associate Members which they shared during the review, including some needing police involvement.</p> <p>3.9 Trustees acknowledged the distrust some students felt with the SU's democracy. They reflected that students across the country were historically uncomfortable with trustee boards and external trustees in SUs when charity law changed and they were first introduced, and that current culture may impact these feelings as there is a general mood of distrust in governing bodies. Trustees suggested holding a democracy 101 event to help students understand the democratic structures and encourage transparency and student engagement.</p>
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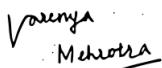
3.10	<p>Trustees discussed the fourth recommendation as this could help us understand and address the anxieties and distrust. They asked whether trustees or student leaders who support the changes could engage with students as well as staff to create an open discussion and understand the threats students are feeling. They acknowledged it can be threatening if you feel your SU isn't controlled by students.</p>
3.11	<p>Trustees discussed the discrepancies between communication, as they believed students were engaged in the process, but students clearly didn't feel this way. Lessons need to be learned on how we engage students in these decisions and make our intentions clear. Others agreed it was important to acknowledge our shortcomings, such as not considering the number of unregistered Associate Members, holding consultations during exam season, and communicating changes via a newsletter.</p>
3.12	<p>Trustees appreciated the draft communication shared and felt it could be more explicit in some places, such as with the increased investment in the safety training fund. It should also share the board's reflections on the importance of students in the SU and decision making.</p>
3.13	<p>Trustees asked for the actions from the motion to be added to the action register so they could have oversight of them and ensure they were happening. They also asked for the actions to be shared in communications with students to show that dissatisfaction is being mitigated.</p>
3.14	<p>ACTION: To add the actions from the Associate Membership motion to the action register by the end of November – HK.</p>
3.15	<p>Trustees asked about student groups' concerns about their finances and what was being done to address this. These concerns stem from different places – including potentially selling fewer memberships without Associate Members, and having to start paying coaches and instructors. Overall membership numbers look very healthy, and it's hoped the instructor scheme shouldn't change groups' financial situations if the instructors were happy to volunteer before. However, if putting money towards groups to support during the transition would help, then the SU would certainly look into how they can support this.</p>
3.16	<p>ACTION: To look at enhancing and increasing accessibility of financial support that can be given to student groups impacted by the associate membership changes, by the end of December – BP/CO'S</p>
3.17	<p>Trustees discussed the decision to review Nightline as they felt there was good practice here in communicating the decision made against the balance of risk. They suggested reviewing this decision and communication to see if anything could be applied to these communications.</p>
3.18	<p>ACTION: To look at the communications around the closure of Nightline to see if the approach around risk could be applied to these communications by the end of November – PA</p>
3.19	<p>Some trustees felt with the level of discourse that they would like more time to talk to students about the changes and not make a decision immediately. However, they also acknowledged that these discussions may go in circles, and it has already taken a long time to discuss and implement.</p>
3.20	<p>Trustees held a vote on the recommendations; 12 trustees voted to approve the recommendations, 1 trustee abstained and 1 trustee voted against the recommendations.</p>
3.21	<p>DECISION: 12 Trustees APPROVED the following recommendations with 1 abstention and 1 vote against:</p>

	<p>1. The Trustee board use their powers to remove Associate Membership (all categories) from the byelaws</p> <p>2. This is communicated quickly and transparently to Student Council, including a reminder of the important reasons for the changes</p> <p>3. The Executive deliver the Actions from the Motion and continue to identify options to add further support for Student Groups to adapt to the changes eg. increasing the size of the Safety Training Fund</p> <p>4. The SU staff team seek to engage with dissatisfied students, in particular on options to improve student council and transparency in the future</p>	
3.22	The trustees thanked the officers and staff team involved in the working group and the Student Council motion for all their work with this difficult situation.	
4	AOB	All
4.1	Trustees received no other business.	

Approved by Co-Chair: Varenya Mehrotra

Signed:

Date: 18/12/2025



Key Documents:

Charity Commission

1. 5 Minute Guides for Charity Trustees
 - 1a. Charity Purposes and Rules
 - 1b. Managing Charity Finances
 - 1c. Managing Conflicts of Interest in a Charity
 - 1d. Making Decisions at a Charity
 - 1e. What to Send to the Charity Commission and How to get Help
 - 1f. Safeguarding for Charities and Trustees
 - 1g. Political Activity and Campaigning by Charities
2. The Essential Trustee – What You Need to Know, What You Need to Do (CC3)
3. It's Your Decision: Charity Trustees and Decision Making (CC27)
4. Conflicts of Interest: A Guide for Charity Trustees (CC29)
5. Charity Meetings (CC48)
6. How To Make Changes to Your Charity's Governing Documents (CC36)
7. How to Report a Serious Incident in Your Charity

Bristol SU Annual Statement of Legal Compliance

Articles – our governing document which includes our Charitable Objects (our purpose)

Byelaws – one of our governing documents. They are a set of rules and regulations that govern how the union operates:

Education Act 1994: Code of Practice – this is the responsibility of the University, it is reviewed annually by the university and Bristol SU

Management Accounts – are circulated monthly to trustees, management group and the University Contact

Policy Library and Policy Register and Review Schedule – all policies are reviewed and approved regularly at the relevant meeting and then formally approved by full Trustee Board

Risk Register – the Risk Register is monitored and reviewed by Management Team and updates are shared quarterly with Trustees at the committees

Trustee Expenses Form