Trustee Board Meeting – Minutes

Date: Tue 21 Apr 2026
Trustee Board Meeting Time: 1 – 4pm
Venue: 5.22 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
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
Keith Feeney (KF)	University Legal Contact
Cassie Agbehenu (CA)	Director of Impact and Influence (attending for item 7)
Christy O'Sullivan (CO'S)	Director of Student Opportunities and Community (attending for item 7)
Paul Arnold (PA)	Director of Digital, Marketing and Enterprise (attending for item 7 and 10)
Rachel Tyrrell (RT)	Director of People, Culture and Organisational Development (attending for item 7)
Thea Wright (TW)	Director of Finance (attending for item 7)
Jemma Harford (JH)	Head of Student Opportunities (attending for item 9)
Maya Al-Khouja (MA-K)	Research and Insight Services Manager (attending for item 12)

Please remember 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.

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No	Item	Lead
	STANDING ITEMS	
1	**Welcome and Apologies**	**Chair**
1.1	Trustees **NOTED** a welcome from the Chair Steph Harris (SH).	
1.2	Trustees **NOTED** trustee members present: 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 Steph Harris (SH) — Co-opted Trustee (Trustee Board Co-Chair)	
1.3	Trustees **NOTED** those in attendance present: Ben Pilling (BP) — Chief Executive Suzanne Doyle (SD) — Governance and L&D Manager and Clerk Hannah Khan (HK) — Governance and Complaints Administrator	
1.4	Trustees **NOTED** apologies from Ella Lovibond (EL), Lucinda Parr (LP) and Keith Feeney (KF), and apologies from Mia Stevens (MS) and Sharan Khemlani (SK) who would have to leave after item 6.	
1.5	Trustees **NOTED** the meeting was recorded for the purpose of those not able to attend and to support the minutes. The recording will be deleted after 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. There had been some changes since the last meeting as Ismail Zarif (IZ) had added a new interest and Allan Allison (AA) had updated one.	
2.2	Trustees **DECLARED** no new interests had arisen, and no corrections were needed on the register.	
2.3	Trustees **DECLARED** no conflicts related to the Register of Interests or conflicts of interest relating to any agenda item.	
3	**Minutes of Last Meeting**	**Chair**
3.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** the minutes of the last trustee board meeting on 14 Jan 2026.	

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3.2	**DECISION: All 12 trustees present APPROVED the minutes of the last trustee board meeting on 14 Jan 2026.**	
4	**Actions and Matters Arising**	**Chair**
4.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** the actions and matters arising from the minutes.	
4.2	Trustees noted the live Trustee Action register for info which includes completed actions**.**	
4.3	Trustees noted some further updates on the actions. The Complaints Database (Roadmap Action I) has been further delayed due to staffing changes as the Head of Digital has left the SU, this should be done by Sep 2026. The Complaints Report (Roadmap Action Z) will go to the Jun FARG meeting as there was no space on the agenda at the Mar meeting.	
4.4	Trustees noted an update on the Co-Opted Trustee recruitment. Steph Hayle (known as Effy) has been appointed as the new Co-Opted Trustee which was approved by email with a majority; she will hopefully join the final Board meeting of the year. The trustees on the recruitment panel were thanked for their work. Trustees were happy with this decision.	
	ASSURANCE	
5	**Nominated Trustee Approval**	**Chair**
5.1	Trustees were asked to approve Lucinda Parr (LP) as the Nominated Trustee for another term as her 3-year term is due to end soon.	
5.2	LP would like to continue as a trustee. Trustees asked about the background of the Nominated Trustee role as it's unusual. All the trustee roles are being reviewed at the Governance and Board Composition Working Group.	
5.3	**DECISION: All 12 trustees APPROVED Lucinda Parr as the Nominated Trustee for another term.**	
	OPERATIONAL REPORTS	
6	**Officer Priority 25/26 Updates – Academic Satisfaction**	**SK/MS/JY**
6.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** a presentation on the Officers' Academic Satisfaction priority.	
6.2	This is the second of the three officer priorities. Officers shared the three sections involved in Academic Satisfaction and the work done to support these, such as new initiatives co-created with students to improve assessment feedback, videos to increase transparency of marking and moderation, a new mentoring program for international Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students, summer provisions for PGT students, and a scheme to support international students with their English skills. They also shared progress on a project looking at student feedback on the pros and cons of releasing timetables early.	
6.3	Trustees asked how students are matched with mentors. The scheme builds on the Careers Service scheme matching undergraduate students with a professional from their industry in Bristol. There is	

	an extensive process to match students with their mentors. Trustees felt the extension of this scheme was really powerful, especially with the Big Bristol SU Survey (BBSU) results priority areas. 	
6.4	Trustees asked about the proportions of home and international PGT students who might engage with summer provisions. There has been a shift in proportions and approximately 60% of PGTs are international students. A representative proportion of students have signed up for the research project.	
6.5	Trustees felt the work was brilliant and that the academic strand of officer priorities had really progressed over the last few years as it wasn't previously a big priority. Officers were commended on their work and the collaborative approach they've built with the university, and they hoped the relationships and projects would continue for years to come.	
6.6	Student trustees shared they had taken part in the mentoring scheme as undergraduates and felt it would be useful for PGTs. They reflected feeling a positive difference to academic structures in the last year, showing the impact this work is having.	
7	**SMT Operational Report and Teaching Block (TB) 1 in Numbers**	**Directors**
7.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** the SMT Operational Report and the TB1 in Numbers Report.	
7.2	Key successes from the report were highlighted. It was a busy and successful period, including an excellent election turnout, a high number of responses to the Rate My Group survey, high uptake and satisfaction from the Staff Engagement Survey and a great Derby Day event. Funding for a staff member at Temple Quarter has been secured and there is some SU space. The Academic Advice team have received positive initial feedback on their Advice Quality Standard charter application.	
7.3	A key challenge was Feb and Mar being very operationally intense due to changes to the academic year which condense the number of weeks students are on campus, and a future challenge will be how the SU can respond to and manage that.	
7.4	A risk and opportunity was highlighted as the Balloon Bar in the Richmond Building will be changing. The bar used to be run by the SU but the university has run for 10 years and they are reviewing its operations and opening times. This may impact on student groups who currently use the bar. However, it may be an opportunity in the long-term as the university has agreed to find more space for SU activity and is discussing the SU managing more areas of the Hawthorns building.	
7.5	Trustees asked why the bar's operating hours are potentially changing. This decision came from the university on the basis of commercial viability.	
7.6	Trustees asked what type of student group events would be impacted. There is a mix, some could transfer to other spaces like the Beckford, but some are too big to transfer. Some groups use the bar as a social area after group activities in the Richmond Building, so this offer could be lost. Groups would be able to book tables in the Beckford for social activities. It may also impact students who aren't as comfortable in drinking-oriented spaces as SU bars feel like a middle-ground, so they will have fewer spaces to use.	
7.7	Trustees asked about the space and timeline of the Hawthorns. This commitment is a good opportunity and having a centre around Senate House will be positive. The space was originally earmarked as a library so the university has to formally agree to change it, then they will have to reinstate the bedrooms and repurpose the ground floor. It will probably take about three years to completely redo it, but the SU may be able to take over some space in the meantime.	

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STRATEGIC UPDATES AND GENERATIVE DISCUSSION		
8	**Lessons Learned Exercise – Membership Changes**	**BP**
8.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** the Lessons Learned exercise and actions relating to Membership Changes that took place in the summer of 2025.	
8.2	The Membership project was challenging at times, so the team wanted to take time to reflect and consider what we could do better in the future and create some actionable learning. The changes caused reputational harm with some student groups, impacted staff, and had a negative impact on the officer team, especially the Union Affairs officer.	
8.3	Three themes were shared. Firstly, the approach to change management, as the SU treated it as part of the Code of Conduct review rather than a new project, and staff who were brought in later flagged that they would have preferred to have earlier input.	
8.4	Secondly, the current democratic structures meant a lot of the conversation played out at Student Council where only officers were visible and accountable. Democratic structures including officer and trustee accountability will be considered in the next Articles and Byelaws Review.	
8.5	Finally, the student response exposed the lack of awareness of the trustee board and its legal responsibilities.	
8.6	It was reported that Group membership sales have increased year on year. 100 coaches have registered with the Coach/Instructor scheme.	
8.7	Trustees were asked to focus on the learning points and actions from the exercise and share if they wanted to add anything to them or if they had any questions or comments.	
8.8	Trustees reflected on conversations they had during voting week as it was a buzzing topic for students, but most were uncertain about what happened rather than being directly against it. This shows a need for greater transparency, especially for the process and decision making.	
8.9	Trustees felt understanding the change cycle is really important and asked about the learning points. They considered if changes could have been implemented in a different order, for example bringing in the coaching scheme first to introduce support mechanisms before the changes were made.	
8.10	It was suggested to introduce Gateway Decision points in future change projects. The Gateways should be agreed in a project brief and checked each time one is reached. The SU is a small organization so it's important not to over-beaurocratise it, but these checks are important for big projects like these.	
8.11	Trustees reflected that the right lessons learned had been captured by the group. The one element they felt was missing was how we engage students from the start with big projects. One of the current strategic priorities is improving how we work with and empower student groups, which will seek to address this.	

8.12	Trustees recognised it had been a difficult time for the officers as they had to carry a lot of the difficult conversations and feedback. They committed to thinking about how to manage this better going forwards.	
8.13	Trustees asked about the support available for impacted groups. The team will continue to work with all groups, and the action point includes ensuring our support and rules apply equally to all group.	
8.14	Trustees felt the Articles review planned for next year, including considering the new model NUS constitution, may support the learning points. They noted there may be some interdependencies with the byelaw changes which would need to be considered alongside the actions.	
8.15	**DECISION: All 12 trustees APPROVED the action points from the Membership Changes Lessons Learned exercise.**	
8.16	**ACTION: To monitor the Actions from the report on the Action Register of Finance, Audit, Risk and Governance (FARG) Committee and to add to the Action register by the end of May 2026 – HK**	
8.17	**ACTION: To look at the final action around trustee visibility in the Governance Code Working Group during 2026 – 2027 – SD**	
9	**Student Group: Empowered to Lead**	**JH**
9.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** a presentation on the Student Groups: Empowered to Lead project.	
9.2	The project aims were recapped. Updates were given on the four core projects, including Reaffiliation which launched successfully with a more tailored approach and less admin. All group committee members are now being asked to complete the Consent Matters training to see the full benefits of affiliation, and the SU will be moving away from the current reaffiliation platform next year which will be a big project but will make the process better.	
9.3	There have been positive advances on Communication especially linking to the Society Forums. There have been delays to the Support and Compliance and Financial Controls strands due to resourcing and other dependencies. The timelines have slightly changed but the final recommendations deadline is the same as it's a key transition date for groups – this won't be the final product but will be an opportunity to try the recommendations.	
9.4	Trustees supported allowing other committee members to be involved in the admin of reaffiliation but asked how the SU would support a less cohesive committee to all complete the training. The team is currently reaching out to people to complete their tasks, and if they don't do this then they'll work with the group to support people to complete them. If there are already challenges in groups then it's important to work through those now. There is a different process if training isn't complete because someone steps down compared to refusing to complete it.	
9.5	Trustees asked who will be involved in the Communication workstreams. They haven't been identified yet but will be very soon and will be led by the Marketing Manager, with others across the SU and some external services such as Sport, Exercise and Health being involved.	
9.6	Trustees asked about the changes to the customer service approach, especially with the lessons learned from the membership changes. This will depend on the elements the working group identifies. In the short term, it involves being present and available for groups.	

9.7	Trustees asked about the risk analysis and whether capacity would be a barrier to proactive relationships being built. Currently there is capacity, but scoping hasn't yet finished, so it will depend on the outcome of that. Resource will be taken up with formulating new ways of working and implementing the Safe Adventures Report recommendations. The team will need support to implement the changes but should have the capacity to run them. As we grow and develop, more funding may be needed, but long term there isn't currently need for a significant additional resource.	
	BREAK	
10	**Future Welcome Fair**	**PA**
10.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** a presentation on the Future of the Welcome Fair and the Welcome Fair Report 2026.	
10.2	This is our largest annual student event and is one of the biggest in the UK. It introduces students to the SU and our services, alongside local organisations, charities, commercial clients and over 300 student groups. The history of the Fair was outlined along with the current version, including positives and challenges. Financial trends were shared to show why it has become more expensive.	
10.3	The Fair is already planned for 2026 but the SU has to decide if the Fair should remain on the Downs for 2027. Trustees were asked to consider some questions and options for the Welcome Fair, and whether the aim of encouraging students to talk to other students and find out more about groups was still relevant, especially if the Give It A Go (GIAG) takeover day continues.	
10.4	Trustees were comfortable with the Fair making a loss if it's aims were clear and it was making an impact; overall they felt the benefits outweighed the costs. They didn't want the SU to rush into finding a different solution as it would take strong communication to make any big changes. They wondered whether the financial loss would be greater if the Fair didn't happen and students didn't engage with the SU this way, but this was difficult to know. They felt if the event would make a loss then the SU should ensure as many students as possible can attend and experience it.	
10.5	Trustees asked if there was any feedback or insight from students. There is currently no specific data, but staff know students like the event and sign up to groups there, although groups get sign ups even without a stall at the Fair. There is no data on the lasting impact of the Fair.	
10.6	Trustees reflected they had made friends at the Fair. They felt GIAG complemented the Fair as the Fair exposed students to a range of groups and activities, while GIAG was a chance to home in on the offer. They felt this would be most effective if GIAG followed the Fair. They were not in favour of splitting the Fair between interest groups as they felt people might pigeonhole themselves.	
10.7	Trustees felt the Fair's aims were still relevant and that the Fair showed the range the SU had to offer early on and was a really positive impression.	
10.8	Trustees felt the SU should continue to hold the Fair on the Downs in 2027 and use the change management process to explore other options for how the Fair could look in the future, engage students in the discussions, and test the Fair's aims. They asked if staff had considered using Tyndall Avenue and Royal Fort Gardens, this was considered previously but not all student groups could fit.	
10.9	Trustees were asked to email Paul Arnold (PA) if they had any other thoughts or suggestions.	

10.10	Trustees asked for the date of the 2026 Welcome Fair, it will be on Friday 18 September.	
11	**Big Bristol SU Survey (BBSU) Update**	**MA-K**
11.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** a presentation on the BBSU results and the BBSU 2026 Report.	
11.2	The BBSU is an annual survey to collect student feedback on Bristol SU, including our offers and priorities. It's a data-driven snapshot of student life which informs the strategy and team plans. Key stats were shared showing overall positive satisfaction and perception of the SU. Trends and priorities were also explored, such as perceptions of the SU decreasing as students progress through their courses. Demographic differences and engagement scores were shared with the least engaged groups highlighted to see who the SU should target. The link between engagement and different areas was shared, with relevancy the only aspect which predicted engagement.	
11.3	Trustees felt the information was really helpful and celebrated the positive scores. The results are used by staff to inform work across the organisation.	
11.4	Data on different SU services was explored, noting all services lead to increased scores and engagement. The more in-depth the service the greater the effect, with the advice services having the most significant impact. It showed the students currently not being reached by the SU are the ones the SU needs to target to increase scores. Satisfaction with the Officer's priorities also led to greater engagement.	
12	**Strategy Action Plan Mid-Year Update**	**BP**
12.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** an update on the Strategy.	
12.2	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **VIEWED** the Management Group detailed tracker airtable.	
12.3	We are part-way through the first year of the three-year strategy. Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) were shared with excellent results so far and a few coming later in the year, including the National Student Survey (NSS) score. Management group meets regularly to reflect on the strategy and share updates.	
12.4	Three areas had very positive momentum – Connected Communities, Financial Accessibility and Empowered Changemakers. Three areas have so far made less progress.	
12.5	Supported Student Leaders is a big project and has been delayed by the Membership changes and some staffing challenges, but it can now begin to move forward. Inclusive Engagement has faced delays with getting the data from the university, and there is a challenge of needing PowerBI to unlock this strand of work.	
12.6	The Student Community Organisers have made good progress but the role is still new at Bristol and in the sector, so we can explore how to make them even more effective. The customer service strand of a Strong SU was picked out and would be a focus of the upcoming All Staff Day.	
12.7	Trustees asked if the newly appointed Head of Digital would bring some of these back on track. The SU has commissioned the university to build the initial PowerBI service so this should progress soon, although the team will need upskilling to use it effectively. When the strategy was drafted there was an appetite for a digital customer service solution which the new Head of Digital can deliver but	

	noted there was more to customer service than this. The digital team is small so losing the previous Head of Digital had a big impact, but the new role holder is good.
12.8	Trustees felt good progress had been made and the update was really good.
	COMMITTEE UPDATES
13	**People, Culture and EDI (PCEDI) Committee** — **Chair – JY**
13.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** a verbal update from the People, Culture and EDI Committee on 17 Mar 2026 from Jessie Yeung (JY).
13.2	It was a good meeting and trustees discussed several things, including several policies which were all approved by PCEDI. There were some discussions about pay and reward which will return to the committee in May.
13.3	Trustees **NOTED** the minutes and items which were discussed: a) The Previous Minutes of People, Culture and EDI Committee on 16 Dec 2025 b) The Staff Data Protection Policy c) The Staff Grievance Policy d) The Staff Hybrid Working Policy e) The Staff Neurodiversity Policy f) The Staff Buying and Selling Leave Policy
13.4	**DECISION: All 12 trustees APPROVED the following, which PCEDI Committee approved and recommend to the full board for formal approval:** **a) The Previous Minutes of People, Culture and EDI Committee on 16 Dec 2025** **b) The Staff Data Protection Policy** **c) The Staff Grievance Policy** **d) The Staff Hybrid Working Policy** **e) The Staff Neurodiversity Policy** **f) The Staff Buying and Selling Leave Policy**
14	**FARG Committee** — **Chair – KS**
14.1	Trustees **RECEIVED** a verbal update from the FARG Committee on 25 Mar 2026 from Kreeshi Shavdia (KS).
14.2	Trustees discussed several things including the management accounts, policies, the budget planning paper, a 3-year financial plan, and some updates and risks.
14.3	Trustees **NOTED** the minutes and items which were discussed: a) The Budget Planning Paper 2026 – 2027

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	b) The Previous Minutes of FARG Committee on 17 Dec 2025 c) The Social Media Policy d) The External Organisations Policy e) The Member Code of Conduct as outlined in the cover sheet (subject to changes outlined in the minutes being included - "We also acknowledge other definitions or working examples from policy that students have passed though Bristol SU democratic processes (e.g. Student Council), including where we have policy to lobby the university on that point"
14.4	**DECISION: All 12 trustees APPROVED the following, which FARG Committee approved and recommend to the full board for approval:** **a) The Budget Planning Paper 2026 – 2027** **b) The Previous Minutes of FARG Committee on 17 Dec 2025** **c) The Social Media Policy** **d) The External Organisations Policy** **e) The Member Code of Conduct as outlined in the cover sheet (subject to changes outlined in the minutes being included)**
14.5	Trustees **NOTED** the following decisions made at FARG Committee: a) That it would be helpful to publish who we invest in b) That it would be useful to see the impact decreasing our threshold to 2% would have on our investments c) That it would be helpful for the Liberations and Campaigns team to ensure it is clear which financial motions apply to the SU, and to make it clear to students what the investments are and how they're overseen and scrutinised by the trustee board to help students make this decision when writing motions. d) Formally approve a decision which was approved on email to move the Democratic Standards Committee elections into Teaching Block 2 e) To ratify the motions which passed at the second TB1 Student Council f) To ratify the motions which passed at the AMM
14.6	**DECISION: All 12 trustees APPROVED the following decisions made at FARG Committee:** a) **That it would be helpful to publish who we invest in** b) **That it would be useful to see the impact decreasing our threshold to 2% would have on our investments** c) **That it would be helpful for the Liberations and Campaigns team to ensure it is clear which financial motions apply to the SU, and to make it clear to students what the investments are and how they're overseen and scrutinised by the trustee board to help students make this decision when writing motions.** d) **Formally approve a decision which was approved on email to move the Democratic Standards Committee elections into Teaching Block 2** e) **To ratify the motions which passed at the second TB1 Student Council** f) **To ratify the motions which passed at the AMM**

15	**For Info**	**Chair**
15.1 15.2	Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** a reminder that the Association of Chairs website offers resources for trustees and chairs which all trustees can now access. We have paid for this for a year so it would be good to know who is using the resource and if it is worth it for next year Trustees **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** the Trustee Attendance Register**.**	
16	**AOB**	**All**
16.1	Trustees received one item of other business as this was IZ's last trustee board meeting. He was thanked for his work and contributions to the board.	

Approved by Co-Chair: Steph Harris
Signed: Stephanie Harris
Date: 30/05/2026