

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Wednesday 2nd October 2024 – Via MS Teams, 17:00**

Present:

Ruttuja Mane (Chair and President) – RM
Jack Lambert (VP Student Activities) – JL
Elliot Atkinson (VP Education) - EA
Beky Williams (Lay Trustee & Deputy Chair) – BW
Erica Burke (Lay Trustee) - EB

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) – SW
John Abell (Minutes)
Knox Cropper Auditors
- Stephen Anderson (SA)
- Christian James (SA)

Apologies

Tim Young (Student Trustee) - TY
Mel Brittain (Lay Trustee) - MB

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies received for TY (Student Trustee) and MB (Lay trustee)

Action: It was noted that MB would arrange a separate meeting with the Auditors due to their expertise in finance if they required it.

7. SU Accounts 2023/24

Item 7 was moved up the agenda.

SA presented the consolidated accounts (including the trading subsidiary). The difference between unrestricted and restricted accounts were explained. A deficit for the year was made of £28,000. Income was up by £20,000 including a rise in bar income and societies income. Income for the Varsity event was lower than the year before. Expenditure decreased by £15,000.

The SUSS pension scheme was explained including how this was presented in the accounts and how changes in interest rates had lowered the deficit. The auditors confirmed that despite the deficit, bank balances are healthy.

Note 18 to the accounts was highlighted to show that the deficit on the unrestricted funds was due to how the liability on the pension fund was shown. Without the pension deficit the Union unrestricted funds are £159,000 (£214,000 in the previous year).

CJ Presented the Audit Findings Report. It was highlighted that the report was unqualified and that the trustees report was consistent with the audit. Internal controls were explained including the recommendation to undertake a VAT review (not because of any issues discovered but due to the complicated nature of VAT in Students' Unions). There were no other internal controls.

SW commented that the £2,700 surplus was down to the valuation of the pension liability and Clubs and Society balances and without this the deficit would have been approximately £40,000.

SW mentioned that the reserves held at the end of the year meant that the SU was below its reserves policy. The policy states that 3 months operating costs were needed which would be approximately £190,000 and the SU was at £159,000. The University are aware of this but not overly concerned.

SA confirmed the SU was very much a going concern due to the block grant.

BW checked that the months that the reserves policy were breached were at the end of the financial year before the block grant was received. SW confirmed this was the case and only for the month of July. BW also raised concerns that the reduction in reserves and income meant that the reserves policy breaches would get worse and asked that the trustees discussed this further when planning future budgets. It was agreed that this would be discussed further in the meeting.

RM thanked Knox Cropper for the audit and for explaining financial items so clearly. SA and CJ left the meeting.

2. Trustee Appointments

It was updated that student trustees were currently being interviewed. It was noted that current applications were from final year students which was not ideal due to the short time they would be in office but would be better than no student trustees. MB was at the end of their term of office but agreed to stay on up to one more year to find a suitable replacement, until October 2025. It was also noted BW only had one more year as a Board member and that work was already underway by SW to seek replacements to enable good handovers.

SW had a CV application from a good candidate, **Action:** it was agreed to pass this on to BW and RM to consider.

EB asked whether the Board had considered what skills it needed from external trustees? SW presented the skills matrix/questionnaire that had been compiled for 24/25. It was noted there was little legal experience but this could be provided by the University or bought in. The skills matrix showed that there was a good range of experiences on the Board.

BW questioned whether someone with business development or fundraising might be necessary due to the financial position of the SU. BW also noted they would be happy to step down early if a new candidate wanted to start earlier. This was noted.

Action: SW agreed that entrepreneurialism/business development questions were added to any future trustee interview questions.

SW thanked BW for their offer and asked that they would do a handover with any new trustee.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising

SW to keep Board informed of any changes to SUSS – **Completed:** SW has briefed Officers on SUSS

Pay award and budget item to be taken to finance committee and communicated to full board. – **Completed**

SW to review byelaws and send to board for virtual decision if implementation is required over the summer – **Completed.** SW thanked those who responded. It was noted that two trustees still needed to respond to the approve the changes to make them live.

SW to check EDI report document and update link for board members to access – **Completed**

2024/25 Meeting dates to be placed into calendars - **Completed**

5. Declarations of Conflicts of Interest (including Register of declarations of Interest)

SW thanked trustees for completing the conflict-of-interest forms.

6. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW presented their report presuming it was read. SW gave a brief update on the University's challenges in meeting its banking covenant. [Commercial in Confidence].

- Student feedback and Welcome Week shows that more daytime events are wanted and were very popular.
- Initial finances for the year show that bar trends are continuing of good attendance but low takings. 400 new Hangar loyalty cards have been distributed. Opening hours are being reviewed minimise costs.
- Insurance annual review was positive with increases in line with budget. The SU has not taken out Cyber or Terrorism cover though SW is checking how the Universities cyber policies and insurance align with the SU.

- Staffing remains challenging to balance both filling roles and saving money. Core functions of the SU are being prioritised.
- Facilities management and the state of parts of the SU building remains challenging however the financial position of the University means this is unlikely to be improved.
- City campus now has an SU presence, and it is hoped to increase this as resources allow.
- There was a 50% increase in September in cases in the Advice Service.
- The University are reviewing student financial support and Officers are pressing this agenda in many University meetings. The SU would like to see an 'opportunities grant' for students alongside a hardship fund.
- The NSS had pleasing results for the SU and scores are being analysed.
- The SU insight survey score needs to be improved by further implementing the strategic plan however the qualitative comments are very pleasing.
- CEO objectives have been agreed for the year.
- KPI measurement against last year will be finished soon.

BW asked whether there were any local hardship funds available to students to take part in opportunities.

Action: It was agreed that BW and SW would engage with the local Council to explore this.

BW asked whether the budget for the year was break even or deficit? SW mentioned that the current budget showed an £87K deficit but work was being done to lower this.

BW asked that when the budget was bought forward it could include the number of months that reserves target will not be met.

Action: To bring the budget forecast to the next Board including how many months the SU would not meet the reserves target.

EB asked whether there was too much in the operating plan due to budgetary constraints and whether there needed to be a prioritisation? SW mentioned several areas had been reduced (such as volunteering) due to capacity and there was focus in the plan on core activity.

A discussion ensued on the difficulties of balancing the need to deliver for students whilst being clear to stakeholders the challenges the Union was facing in resourcing services and in reporting that. [Commercial in Confidence]

BW suggested we need to be clearer on what can no longer be funded in the operational plan.

EB asked whether the operational plan or University reports could be split into bronze/silver/gold or nice to have / can't afford to involve University in decisions on extra funding?

Approval Items

7. Draft Year End Accounts

Completed earlier in the agenda.

8. WSU Operational Plan 2024/5

The plan was noted. SW explained this would be a live document that would be continued to be updated.

EB asked whether some of the objectives could be SMARTer?

Action: SW agreed and noted these would be improved and honed over time.

Board approved the Operational Plan 2024/25.

9. Joint Code of Conduct for Freedom of Speech with the University

It was noted the Labour government had cancelled this legislation however the work was still needed.

The Board approved the Code of Conduct

10. Terms of reference for the Board 2024/25

Board approved the Terms of Reference

11. WSU Code of Conduct for Members and Officers (Elections)

SW explained the Code had been made clearer, more accessible and fitted better with the updated Bye Laws.

EB asked whether the increasing number of under 18s meant that more SU staff needed DBS checks? SW stated this had been checked with the University and guidance was being followed and we currently do not need to implement these.

BW asked about safeguarding and raised concerns about sports coaches because that would be regulated activity and asked whose job it was to check coaches were DBS checked? SW noted that this was being worked through on a case-by-case basis and it was responsibility of the SU to do due diligence.

JL noted that all clubs had to declare who their coaches are at the start of the year.

BW noted there was a member of staff on campus who could support in this area which SW appreciated.

Board approved the Code of Conduct and noted that this would mean the Network byelaw would consequently need updating to reflect certain changes in the Code.

Action: Network bye-law to be revised at the next meeting.

12. Appointment of Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) and Returning Officer (RO) (Leadership Elections) for 2024/25

Board approved Val Yates, the University's Director of Access and Inclusion as DRO and NUS as RO.

13. Appointment of Lead Trustee for 2024/25

SW explained the role of Lead Trustee. Board approved that EB would resume their role as Lead Trustee for 2024/25

Reporting Items

14. Board Sub-Committees

- 14.1 HR Sub Committee has been postponed. EA noted that several policies would be on the agenda including the updated student staff handbook and EDI Policy.
- 14.2 Finance Sub Committee – RM noted much of the meeting concerned the recent Audit. It was also agreed that a tender process for external auditors would begin soon, and it was expected that a VAT review would be part of the process.

Trading performance was also discussed along with sponsorship. It was agreed to alter the delegation matrix so that the CE did not have to sign so many purchase orders and support financial education in the organisation.

15. Officers Report

JL presented the report. RM objectives are sustainability campaigning, a housing campaign, cost of living. There are issues with the 'hey girls' campaign in terms of supplies of period products and their desire for this to be more targeted. There was a very successful virtual 'get to know the SU' pre-arrival webinar that had over 300 attendees.

EA Objectives – Focussing on explaining timetabling to students, developing the community of academic Reps, supporting neurodiverse students and recruiting more Reps.

JL Objectives – Enhancing the student experience in the most cost-effective way, securing more daytime experiences, developing a What's On page for all University events. Varsity is being progressed with Gloucester SU and there was a great effort in Welcome Festival with positive feedback.

Joint objectives – Running a mental health campaign and addressing the cost-of-living crisis. Breakfast cub has been funded by the University and is a good initiative to break down barriers.

BW noted how positive the joint initiatives were and inquired whether anyone had taken up free mental health first aid training? RM noted this was on the agenda and was being investigated.

EB concurred that the initiatives were fantastic and asked how engaged the student body were with the Officer priorities? EA noted that council and sub-councils were updated to reach SU stakeholders and social media was used to reach a wider audience. JL agreed that there would be many students who would be brilliant in supporting the SU if they knew more about it so that was a priority.

16. Executive Committee Summary

JL presented the report. No new clubs and societies were approved but it is hoped there will be more soon. Executive were updated on Officer objectives and new policies. Dudley and City campuses was discussed and engaging with students there will be a priority. NSS feedback was discussed.

17. Student Council Summary

EA noted that the first student council would be 22nd October

18. Board of Governors Summary

RM gave a verbal update on the last meeting of the Board of Governors.

The University is looking at investing in a partially funded cricket centre and the balance of investing against saving funds was discussed and this was approved. The University has decided to sell some land to raise funding. There was a discussion on funding and the budget for the year ahead.

It was noted the SU report received a round of applause.

Meeting closed 19:00

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
MB to have a separate meeting with Knox Cropper if required	SW and MB	Next meeting
SW to pass on the CV of the candidate to be an external trustee to BW and RM to consider	SW	Next meeting
SW to add business development and entrepreneurial questions to the next external trustee interview	SW	Next round of external trustee recruitment
To engage with the Council to see if there is any hardship or opportunity funding available to students	SW and BW	Next meeting
To bring the budget forecast to the next Board including how many months the SU would not meet the reserves target. Operational plan to have SMART targets added	SW	Next meeting
Network bye-law to be revised at the next meeting due to changes in the Code of Conduct	SW	Ongoing
	SW	Next meeting

Next Meeting 26th November 2024 at 5pm