

Students' Union Trustee Board

Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Wednesday 2nd February 2025 – 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 Vice Chair) – BW
Erica Burke (Lay Trustee) – EB
William Callaway (Ratified as Lay Trustee, Item 1 - WC)
Liv Otterwell (Ratified as Student Trustee, Item 1 - LO)
Tim Young (Student Trustee) – TY

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) – SW
John Abell (Minutes)

Apologies (Absence).

Mel Brittain (Lay Trustee) - MB

1. Attendance, Membership and Apologies

RM welcomed the potential new members of the Board. Concern was raised as to the recent attendance of one Trustee [Commercial in Confidence].

2. Trustee Appointments

RM introduced William Callaway as a new Lay Trustee and Liv Otterwell as new Student Trustee.

Decision – The Board ratified WC and LO as new members.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

Decision - Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

4. Matters arising

- CE to look into Warm Funding grants – Agreed to remove this from the Action Log
- CE to arrange a meeting with Trustees to discuss Finances of Union – No longer needed

- CE to report to the University Vice-Chancellor the service implications of not having funding to replace SU staff – Agenda item 6
- CE to bring a proposal on changing board composition to increase number of lay trustees – Agenda item 9

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

WC declared that he had had a working relationship with SW due to them both previously being on the board of the OIA, and also that he is friends with the Worcester University Registrar.

6. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW presented their report presuming it was read. Of particular note:

- Budgets and finance remain challenging and the forecast £15K deficit budget will now not be met due to the need for staff recruitment.
- Costs have been reduced in the bar and February attendance has been good.
- SW has met with the Vice Chancellor to discuss SU funding. SW presented the challenges the SU is facing and the concern of the Board (particularly for next financial year) if income isn't increased. SW outlined the services that are being impacted and the complexity of the diverse student body and new campus locations. The challenges of the space the SU occupies was also expressed.
- The VC noted that the University had gone through one of the most challenging times in its history, but that next year was looking more positive and student numbers looked like they would improve. The VC noted that catering was an issue and that a cheaper option for students within the SU space was being considered. The VC noted a development fund to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of the University that would raise funds from alumni and benefactors. This was being allocated in the main to student hardship and capital development and it may be that funds could be raised to support SU development.
- The VC also suggested he was happy for the SU to raise funds from local businesses who want to recruit students for part-time work.

[Commercial in Confidence]

SW and RC then attended a quarterly finance meeting with the University PVC Finance and Resources, and they were receptive and interested. SW noted that the SU would need £85K just to cover minimum wage and NI increases. The block grant submission will reflect the need for a significant increase whilst acknowledging the challenges still facing the University.

SW noted the SU is being necessarily firmer in pushing back on requests from the University where it doesn't have the resources to do them.

WC noted that the University sector is going through a very difficult time due to a drop in international student recruitment and increased recruitment from higher tariff universities. It is surprising that the University should be optimistic for next year. SW noted that the SU had not had a block grant rise in 4 years.

- SW noted that there had been 6 tenders for the audit tender. The current auditors have re-tendered.
- The University is undertaking an internal audit of the SU as the last one was undertaken in 2018. SW will report back on the terms of reference for this. **(Action)**.
- Staffing vacancies have meant Senior Managers have had to do administrative tasks. Two new administrator roles have been recruited, and their roles have been designed to fill most administrative tasks - though this impacts on the end of year deficit. These roles are fixed term for 1 year.
- SUSS have offered to talk to the trustee board if required about the current situation and the implications of scheme exit by other SUs. IN a meeting with SW, a SUSS Trustee suggested that the University should be open to supporting the SU to leave the scheme as a means to reduce future risk.
- SW has included an update on CEO objectives to note in the paper pack.

RM thanked SW for the hard work over the last period.

TY left the meeting due to a prior commitment.

WC noted that the University had had a drop in income over recent years which may explain the lack of inflationary rise for the SU.

WC asked whether the University could be asked to support with any additional SUSS costs?

SW replied that the University was aware of SUSS but they had historically declined to support the SU with this but that it would be noted in the block grant discussions.

EB asked whether there was a sense that the SU was having a good year overall?

SW replied that she genuinely believed that the SU provided a very good, welcoming service to students. It has been hard to be positive due to the finances, but it is important that the great work of the SU is noted.

EA noted they had been at the medical building recently providing free breakfast and there was a great sense of gratitude from students who

were there as to the effort the SU was putting in and that he agreed the SU does a very good job for the resources available.

WC noted that finances was an issue for many SUs. They thanked SW and the officers for the hard work they gave for their members. They asked how much money the SU had in reserves.

SW explained the reserves policy and cash flow of the organisation and noted that this year the SU would be below its reserve target for 1, possibly 2 months this year. The concern was next year if reserves continued to be depleted.

RM noted that students who engaged with the SU were very grateful for the work that the SU put in. They reminded new committee members to ask if they had any questions or to put them in the chat if any of terms used in reports needed clarifying.

Approval Items

7. Monthly Management Accounts – Dec 2024

Decision – The monthly accounts were approved.

8. WSU Operational Plan 2024/5

SW explained the plan. There are concerns around engagement in democratic processes such as the Ideas Forum and Annual General Meeting and society levels are not at pre-covid levels. Otherwise, the SU plan is progressing well and as expected.

Decision – The operational plan was approved.

9. Update to Bye-Law 2 (Elected officers and the Trustee Board)

Student Council had amended the initial plan so it was proposed that student trustees would stay up to 4 and lay-trustees would be increased from up to 3 to up to 4.

SW would also like the flexibility for more than one trustee on each sub-committee and, also, noted the amendment that Student Council members should not be student trustees as this is best practice in the sector.

Decision – Board approved the changes to Bye-Law 2.

Reporting Items

10. Board Sub-Committees

EA noted the highlights of the recent HR Sub-Committee which included the annual approval of the safeguarding policy, as well as the action plan related to the Sexual Harassment policy (Protection of Workers Act 2023) that had been previously drafted. SW noted they were hoping to work with the University on staff training around sexual harassment (a condition of the Act) as external training would be expensive.

RM noted that the Finance Sub Committee wasn't quorate. When it is reconvened, it will consider the budget, audit tender, membership of the committee and University finance quarterly meetings. Other trustees are welcome to attend the meeting.

11. Officers Report

Highlights of the report were presented.

RM is working on:

- Employability week is being planned.
- A draft University Mental Health policy is being reviewed
- Race equality week

EA is working on:

- Attending the student retention group
- Micro learning steering group
- Increasing SU attendance at Dudley Campus

JL is working on:

- The University Christmas committee to support students who stayed on campus
- Charing Student Activities Council
- Many student society events and BUCS meetings.

12. Executive Committee Minutes

There have been 2 Executive Committee meetings. JL presented the highlights of these meetings including the approval of 3 new societies. It was noted that the University had raised just over £1,000 to support the Community Cupboard and the SU were now able to include City Campus in the initiative. RM noted that Breakfast with the SU was continuing, and now themed breakfasts are now being rolled out.

BW noted the organisation In Kind Direct who may be able to support with cheaper charity purchases in particular period products. RM confirmed that she was aware of In Kind Direct and they SU had contacted them in the past.

13. Student Council Summary

EA noted the second Student Council meeting had been held in December and it was productive. Highlights include:

- A policy which was passed on accessibility of the SU website.
- A discussion with the University registrar on the student charter.
- A proposal on an amendment on the academic year to slightly change semester 2.
- A presentation of the SU annual accounts

14. Board of Governors Summary

RM noted that the next Board of Governors would be on 25th February.

Highlights from other University committees are that student number applications are currently at 15% up for September and this is spread across courses. This excludes medical and nursing students.

RM has also attended the Awards Committee which is trying to increase the diversity of those awarded honorary degrees and fellowships.

The University is also reviewing its Strategic Plan which will have input from the officers.

15. Any Other Business

NA

Meeting closed 18:40

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
(Previous meeting) To bring the budget forecast to the next Board including how many months the SU would not meet the reserves target.	SW	Next meeting
To bring the terms of reference for the University internal audit of the SU.	SW	Next meeting

Next Meeting 1st April 2025 at 5pm