

Worcester Students' Union's - All Student Meeting (ASM)

25/03/2025 12:00am-1:30pm, Yelland Lecture Theatre

Attendance

Panel

Ruttuja Mane (RM (SU President), Elliot Atkinson (EA (Vice President Education), Jack Lambert (JL (Vice President Student Activities)

Members

22 current students at University of Worcester (19 in person, 3 online); and 3 Officer Trustees (listed above)

Also in attendance (from SU core staff team):

Sophie Williams (SW (Chief Executive), Robert Cox (RC (Director of Finance & Commercial), Antonia Rossiter-Eaglesfield (ARE (Director of Representation and Membership Services), Clement Servini (CS (Marketing and Communications Coordinator), Luca Campos (LC (HR & Governance Administrator and Minute-taker), Barney Blake (BB (BUCS Sport Administrator), Jasmine-Alicia Clements (JAC (Marketing and Communications Assistant), Ella Dee (ED (Finance & Operations Administrator), Olivia Williams (OW (Student Engagement Administrator), Molly Parker (MP (Academic & Welfare Advisor), Sophie Smith (SS (Student Activities Manager)

Apologies:

There were no apologies for the 2024/25 ASM.

Minutes

Welcome

RM welcomed all to the All Student Meeting and thanked them for taking the time to come, learn more about the priorities of the SU, and to offer feedback for how the SU is run in the future. She emphasised that as a student led organisation, it is crucial to ensure that our members are at the heart of our decision-making processes and have regular opportunities to hold the SU to account. RM encouraged the members to provide feedback and ask questions.

RM introduced the officers, SW and RC, and the University's Provost Ann Jordan.

RM went through the agenda for the meeting as presented on the slide shared on the screen. She then explained that due to the number of member attendees (22) not reaching the necessary amount (50), the meeting is considered 'not quorate'.

Approval of minutes

Due to quoracy it was not possible to vote for approval.

Strategic Framework 2023-28 overview

SW introduced herself and explained her role in the SU as Chief Executive.

SW emphasised the importance of the SU long-term goals, giving an overview of the 2023-28 strategic framework and how it came to fruition, following extensive consultation with the student body across an 18-month period. SW took the attendees through the SU's vision, mission, and values.

In terms of the Union's key Strategic Themes, from consulting students, the key concerns that came through were money worries, mental health, that the SU was only for some types of students, that students wanted the SU to hold the University to account, and that it was sometimes too complicated to get involved with the SU. SW explained that from these, the staff and officers developed the 5 key themes of

- Building connected communities where students feel they belong
- Making sure our diverse student body is represented
- Empowering students to have their say
- Understanding students' financial realities and reflecting that in what we do
- and encouraging and supporting students to prioritise their wellbeing.

SW finished her presentation by summarising that this framework will accompany the SU until 2028 and that it is kept on track through a yearly operational plan.

Students' Union Accounts Review for the year 2023/24

RC gave us the overview of the finances surrounding the SU, starting with a breakdown of the income:

- The largest source of income is from donations, the most significant being the block grant from the university (£600,000), and other smaller grants;
- The second largest lies on the student activities, mostly made up of club/society memberships;
- The third largest revenue is from The Hangar Bar;
- The fourth largest revenue relates to sponsorships primarily from Tramps and Dominos.

RC also noted that the bar's income has been declining, suspected to be partly a reflection of the rising cost of living.

The following slide was on the SU's expenditure:

- One of the biggest costs is the staff wages, which are split across various areas;
- The second largest area of expenditure is Student Activities – half around what clubs/societies spend on themselves, half around the support given by the SU to student activities (e.g. staff, club and society grants, RAG activities, fixtures and events transport subsidies etc.);
- The next largest is the bar and commercial activities, this covers all costs related to running the bar. I.e. stock purchases and student staff wages;
- The fourth largest cost refers to representation – payments towards Department Reps, Elected Officers, campaigns – and governance meetings such as this present one and Student Council.

RC summarised that, in 2023/2024, the total income was just over a million pound (£1,011,070), but the total expenditure (£1,039,232) surpassed this value, which resulted in a loss of £28,162.

It was explained that the aim is to break even, but as consequence of:

- Block grant having been frozen for three years, whilst costs kept rising;
- Increases to the National Living Wage;
- Spend per head in the bar decreasing over time despite student engagement staying high;

A small deficit had been achieved this year.

To combat the increasing costs and reduced income the SU instigated a moratorium on all non-essential spend very early in the financial year, as well as delaying replacing staff when staff left the organisation. The effect of this was to reduce the loss from a forecast £90k to the £28k achieved.

It has become increasingly difficult to deliver a break-even budget over the years, which is what the SU aims to do as a charity. RC added that this is a situation facing many SUs at present across the country.

RC explained that, for one month across the year, the SU's reserves went below where they ideally should stay, and that it is possible to be below reserve levels for 6 months before implementing a recovery plan with the trustees (in line with the reserves policy). He stated that a recovery plan would, however, be put in place way before the SU got into that position.

For 2024/25 the SU is currently forecasting a loss of around £40,000 RC noted that a higher block grant from the university for future years is required to prevent the organisation from breaching its reserves policy.

(After offering attendees the opportunity to ask questions, none were raised at this point.)

SW followed with an additional explanation that the funds within clubs/societies from membership fees are restricted funds, which means the SU cannot use them for general business despite appearing on the accounts and the SU merely acts as a 'gatekeeper' for this money for the student groups to access. RC continued by explaining what happens to the funds of a folded club/society, initially the funds must be kept for 3 years in case the first becomes active again.

Q1. "What happens after 3 years?"

RC explained that after 3 years the funds will remain as restricted reserves but will be moved into a funding pot that can be used on any new or existing club or society to help them, for example, attract new members, meet Health and Safety regulations, replace ageing kit and equipment.

Q2. "Why is that staff wages make up most of the expenditure?"

RC explained that that cost depends on how many staff members are necessary to run the SU, and that it was a usual figure (60-70%) for any business, including charities. SW corroborated this point, adding that currently the SU has 15 members of core staff when previously they had peaked at were 22. The majority of the SU work involves working directly with students, with very little spent on purchasing stock items and other consumables, hence the majority of spend is on staff and student staff wages.

Students' Union affiliations review

RM introduced the review of the SU's affiliations, starting with the National Union of Students (NUS), which is expected to cost £15,000. She explained that this affiliation provides access to training and development for officers and staff, and a voice at a national level. The NUS also supplies the SU with items sold in the bar at a reduced cost, allowing us to sell it cheaper

SW explained how the NUS affiliation cost is proportional to the block grant the SU receives.

(No questions were presented after RM's prompting.)

JL continued by presenting the second affiliation - BUCS - and it allows the students to take part in a wide range inter-university competitive sports and sports development. The projected cost for this year will be £12,287.

Q3. "Are the majority of costs of BUCS due to their staff?"

SW explained that BUCS, as a charity, spends mostly on staff, events and fixtures, development programmes for students, campaigns, the creation of toolkits, facilitating training, and events such as conferences.

RM then introduced the Advice UK affiliation, which costs £290 this year. She described the service provided, which gives access to specialist training courses, professional insurance, and case management software at reduced rates, which allows the Help and Advice service to stay effective.

(No questions presented.)

JL presented the current clubs and societies' affiliations, and how some of them have fees that are covered by the club/society funds, whilst others are free. He also mentioned that the SU is the legal entity affiliating to those organisations, which means they must be approved. For this end, JL referred to the slide on display listing:

- Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship
- Coppafeel!
- The Student Scout and Guide Organisation
- British American Football Association
- Archery GB
- County of Worcestershire Archery Association
- West Midland Archery Society
- England Athletics
- Basketball England
- British Mountaineering Council
- British Fencing
- Worcestershire FA
- Rugby Football Union
- Students' Rugby Football Union
- British Universities Swim League (BUSL)
- Lawn Tennis Association
- Northern English Universities Trampolining (NEUT)
- Volleyball England
- British Wheelchair Basketball

JL asked if there were any questions, none were presented.

Review of 2023/2024

RM initiated the overview and highlights of the previous academic year:

- The Help and Advice service continued to support students, dealing with over 400 cases and delivering 70 hours of outreach;
- There were almost 850 society memberships from near 700 students, and 10 new societies created;
- The sports clubs saw over 1,100 memberships from approximately 1,000 students. Big successes in BUCS competition, finishing 60th in the overall BUCS rankings;
- Successfully defended the Varsity trophy, winning 13-4 overall and bringing Varsity back to Worcester for the 2nd year in a row;
- The VPSA, Issy, ran an extensive consent campaign, with workshops and lectures, and an appearance on the local radio;
- Helped to support students during the ongoing cost-of-living crisis;
- Continuation of the Community Cupboard, giving away more than 1,300 donations of food and toiletries;

- The Breakfast Club returned with free breakfasts hosted in the SU, at City Campus, and at the new Medical School;
- Continued to run the Period Dignity initiative, working with Hey Girls to provide free period products to both students and the wider Worcester community;
- Last year's President, Al, campaigned for the University to introduce an International Hardship Fund for the international students.

EA followed:

- More than 3,000 total votes received during the leadership elections, with the participation of over 1,000 individual voters;
- Increasingly stronger Academic Representation system, with Course Reps and Department Reps helping to improve the learning experience across the university;
- Student Council passed eight motions, ranging from recognising and promoting Race Equality Week to ensuring lectures continue to be recorded;
- The Sub-Councils of Student Council continued to represent all students and work for positive change in the SU and across the university.

RM continued:

- The seven student-led Networks continued to support students with campaigns and events, including Race Equality Week and the 'Little Less Conversation, More Action Please' campaign;
- Trained the committee members on EDI, as well as the Officers and staff team undertook training and awareness on a variety of related matters;
- Worked towards ensuring all events, campaigns, and services are accessible to all students, looking at both the SU's internal processes and working with the university to improve accessibility across campuses;
- The Hangar team worked throughout the year, alongside various student groups, to deliver a full programme of diverse cultural events. Those include the Chinese New Year, a Bollywood Night, Race Equality Week, and the LGBTQ+ Valentines Ball.

JL continued:

- The Welcome Festival was one of the highlights of this year. It was a full programme of events in both the daytime and evening, with over 4,000 students attending across the week;
- The volunteering offering, TeamWorc Action, saw high engagement, with almost 7,000 volunteering hours logged across the year;
- High engagement in Raise and Give, with student-led events and fundraisers, raised over £15,000 for charity.
- And ended the year with Celebration Week, celebrating all students and staff that make Worcester great through TeamWorc Awards and Students' Choice Awards.

Officer Updates for 2024/25

RM introduced this point of the agenda, starting with her accomplishments this academic year as the SU President, how it corresponded with her manifesto and what her objectives were for the year. These related to the cost of living, housing and sustainability:

- Kitchen Korner
- Scrap Paper Points
- Career's team collab, with the hosting of an Employability Week
- Help and Advice collab for the creation of 'Housing Guides'
- Representing students in conversations regarding accommodation issues
- Meeting with Chartwells to exchange feedback on the on-campus food and prices
- Community Cupboard, free period products scheme, and breakfast club (rebranded to 'Breakfast with the SU')
- Other matters: student parking prices, local transport costs, transport issues for nursing students, equipment relocation for animation students, hosting cultural events, and many more.

RM also conveyed her wish to finish her time in office with the conclusion of the advertisement of the use of recyclable cups at campus coffee shops, collecting more donations for Kitchen Korner, and the continuous push for student feedback on accommodation prices and student experience.

EA then began his report on his accomplishments, objectives, and actions surrounding transparency and awareness of university processes.

- Timetabling was especially targeted, with meetings between the team and students to better understand the decisions around it
- Conversations on classrooms not being fit for purpose or serving the classes' needs
- Celebrating neurodiversity and ensuring RAPs (Reasonable Adjustment Plans) are implemented by lecturers
- Inclusive teaching
- Enhancement of the academic representation system (Course and Department Reps)
- Joint Honours students' experience, including information on the university's website, the provision of an appropriate number of course reps
- Academic quality processes (e.g. student representation on course approvals), and a review of the assessment policy.

JL emphasised his role around the support and representation of the various students on a plethora of areas of the extracurricular experience.

- Creation of a more vibrant and inclusive campus through the organisation of a wider range of events
- Improvement of the spectator experience during Varsity through student feedback
- Creation of a comprehensive "What's On" website page for all university events, including those hosted by students - to be launched and staff to be trained on how to keep it up to date

- Supported Movember events through the access to supplies promotions and resources
- Helped students set up new clubs and societies: 2 new clubs, 6 new societies, 8 societies adopted.

Question Time session

EA invited students to ask questions.

- Q4. A student agreed that there is an issue with the retention of members in societies, and asked if it would be possible to open up to the general public to gain more members and money, or possibly make partnerships with external organisations to gain funding by charging a fee to book rooms.

SW explained that as a membership organisation, the SU serves the current student body (SU members). She added that societies and clubs can have affiliate membership members, who tend to be alumni but a limited number is allowed. She explained that The Hangar frequently works with the local community and organisations, offering their space for charities events and charging a competitive rate to businesses. Societies can link with local organisations, but it is not possible to have outside members due to safeguarding.

- Q4.1. The same student suggested that not many students probably knew alumni could be affiliate members.

Post-meeting note: Being followed by the Student Activities team.

SW agreed that the SU likely can do more around the matter, and that the recommendation will be kept in mind. She remarked that students tend to not read the bye-laws, and that the SU can work on encouraging students and committees to understand that there can be affiliate members, but that they tend to be students who have graduated.

- Q5. Another student pointed out that there's a great discrepancy between coffee prices (machines) across the campus and within campuses, for sometimes the same coffee and inquired why that is.

RM said that feedback was received before and that Chartwells, the University's caterers, run the food and hot drink outlets. SW added that Chartwells deliberately have different pricing to ensure cheaper prices in places for students, but that she wasn't aware it was for the same coffee. RC said he would like to raise the question to Chartwells.

Post-meeting note: RC to raise this point in next regular meeting with Chartwells in May.

- Q6. "What is the maximum number of alumni that can get involved in membership of a society?"

ARE responded by pointing them towards the society constitutions and that normally it is no more than 30% of their whole membership.

- Q7. Student complained that the mental health help is too academically focused. He feels unsupported and not properly listened to.

SW thanked him for raising a personal issue and asked him to give more feedback to RM following the meeting for her to take forward, as the SU has a working relationship with the student services and the SU had not had this feedback before.

Post-meeting note: RM met with the student and has followed up with the relevant University management for student services.

- Q8. Student asked if there is any way to establish a corner for students to make their own tea/coffee free of charge and to have more support for breakfast.

RM said she would like to raise his point to the University's Campus Experience and Development Group, especially since it is relevant to students burdened by the cost-of-living crisis and thanked him for his feedback. She mentioned that she has heard about that from students based in Jenny Lynd, and that there is a space for those purposes but that it is restricted. JL added this is why the SU started initiatives like the Community Cupboard and Breakfast with the SU, and how they help supporting students through them. SW mentioned the available microwaves, but acknowledged that is not the same as having a kitchen. She added that students can get hot water from the food outlets.

Post-meeting note: RM raised this with the Campus Experience and Development Group. It was suggested that the Sustainability Hub in the Thomas Telford building was a place where students can go, tea and coffee are available there. No other suggestions were offered.

- Q9. Student asked if it is possible to augment the social space in Jenny Lind as there isn't enough seating.

EA said he has been working on it with Lisa Stansbie (Campus Development lead) to ensure the space is as it should be, and it overlaps with the coffee machines issue that only recently was resolved.

Post-meeting note: SW to raise with Lisa Stansbie.

- Q10. An online student asked, "How will the SU continue to support societies that want to grow more?"

JL explained that there are some ways the SU helps, for example, that there is a 'Dragon's Den style' process where students apply for grants to help promote and attain supplies. SW added that recently they got external funding from Enterprise for gaming and Business societies.

Q11. A student stated that since some changes took place and staff became redundant, it was difficult to have a dedicated meeting space with their disability mentor, and the student felt forced to meet with her mentor in the reception area, which isn't very private. She complained that they cannot book rooms for their sessions, with the staff saying that it is due to GDPR.

RM thanked her for raising the issue and said she is aware about staff having been made redundant but that she was not aware of the space issue. RM reassured the student she will discuss it with the student services and ask for dedicated spaces. She also mentioned a current issue around booking rooms. If mentors are external there are added issues to use the system.

Q11.1. Student added that the university said it was her mentor's responsibility to book a room, however, they cannot do anything due to being external and the student is not allowed to book rooms either. She expressed frustration on having to waste time trying to find a room when it is already limited.

RM agreed it is not ideal, and SW proposed that in the interim the student can be referred to the SU Welcome Desk for help.

Post-meeting note: RM to raise this at the university's EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) Oversight Group.

Q12. A student noted there was a meeting in December wherein students complained about having to pay for hot water at the campus cafes and wants to know how far the feedback has gone.

ARE confirmed she had looked into this issue as it had been raised previously at a Student Council meeting. ARE found most outlets allow people to have free hot water. What was noted was that some signage (specifically within Elgar Kitchen) does display a charge for 'Hot Water' but what this is in fact referring to is hot water for a teabag and milk. Where the confusion arises is this signage is found on the self-serve machines because the machine itself calls tea 'Hot Water' so users are pointed to the correct item on the machine. This issue has been passed on to the officers to raise with Chartwells. RM confirmed it is possible to go to outlets and get hot water for free.

Q12.1. Another student emphasised that it is difficult for people to go up to the staff to ask for it and asked if it would be possible for the canteen to have a spot for hot water instead.

RM thanked him and said she would be adding it to the topics to discuss with the Campus Development group.

Post-meeting note: RM liaised with Chartwells and they have agreed to improve the signage.

Q13. Student asked RM about the Scrap Paper initiative, saying she had never heard of it.

RM explained that it was recently launched and where the locations of the five points are to recycle paper are. She added she is open to hear what other spots would be good for the initiative. The student remarked it would be good to have more advertisement around it, RM agreed and said they would be doing so.

Post-meeting note: RM to ensure SU raise awareness on social media, and email details to course reps and department reps.

EA thanked the audience for their questions and passed the lead to the university's provost.

University Strategy

Ann Jordan thanked the staff for the opportunity, apologised for the upcoming repetitions for those who had attended related meetings, and mentioned that the program Mentimeter would be used to gather responses.

The Provost introduced the strategic plan by explaining that, every 5 years, the university's leadership team consults and discusses with the various parties involved what direction the university should take.

Ann explained that the board of governors owns the strategic plan and they are whom the team sends feedback to. As the timescale is prepared for 2030, she welcomed students to give as much feedback as possible – it will be collated and analysed in order to create a set of key priorities. It is expected that by the end of the academic year, the plan will be adopted by the board of governors.

Ann then welcomed the attendees to provide any kind of ideas and feedback. ARE explained how students can participate live in this meeting through the QR code in the slides.

The provost asked the first question, "What are the things that currently work well?" Students replied:

- "cohort sizes / size of uni is good!" – a student also mentioned he prefers the smaller size of this university compared to the previous one he frequented.
- "Yes, my class sizes are good"
- "I like the focus on the environment, including the allotments and gardens."
- "Fancy a cuppa Lots of practical experience for science courses Small cohort size"
- "The teaching and lectures are all going well"
- "lots of opportunities for student engagement"
- "Transparency and disclosure between the student union and the student body."
- The first point has been helpful and supportive"
- "The well-being events with the therapy dogs and chats are nice"

Ann asked what things students would like to see more of / to further develop:

- More writers in residence, which the provost acknowledged and remarked that she believes them to be delivering a good job together with the academic librarians in The Hive.
- A student would like to have more advertisements on what the university can provide, claiming students only get to know them too late.
- "development opportunities for students who aren't in representative positions"
- "More accessible doors for disabled students"
- More events with the student union, in particular accessible events."
- "More placement opportunities for psychology. This is something I would have loved to gain experience through and was disappointed that I didn't get this opportunity." - Ann mentioned that work placements are one of the areas the university will be looking into, as well as developing internships.
- "The ability to book rooms as a student"
- "Students involvement and engagements in SU activities"
- "More events to be held in other locations such as city campus"
- "Library services at St John's campus. Eg. Book return point" - Ann said she will look into it.
- "More affordable accommodation" / "I very much agree with more affordable accommodation" - The provost said that there will be changes in law around the landlords and that she does not know how that will affect prices. She mentioned the costs of university accommodations are similar to other universities, but reminded the UoW has a longer period which should be advertised.
- "Frequent leadership training"

Ann asked what things the university should do that it does not currently do:

- "Accessible campus" - A student said she wants a more accessible campus, that there is a lack of accessible buttons and door changes, staircases are not safe, wheelchair users cannot get to some places, that there is a need for tactile door signs. Ann said she knows that this work has been initiated and must continue, and that this is a point of pride for the university, therefore it cannot be abandoned.
- "More research opportunities for all students" - The provost said they have been working on it and reviewing a past initiative that can be improved for the future.
- "Improved sporting facilities"
- "Reduce the minimum membership for societies to operate, to reflect that most societies are struggling to recruit new members in the cost of living crisis."
- "I am really happy with the way the university is overall. I think we need more training on AI on how to use it correctly." - Ann eagerly agreed.
- "Upgrading the WiFi services around all the campuses" - Ann asked if there are still cold spots and students nodded.
- "activities for students who might commute and are stuck with 4 hours between lectures in a day"
- "Make St John's campus look nicer and improve the Hangar space" - Ann said they have been working on it. At this point, a student asked which one is the main campus and Ann explained St John's was the original campus, but now it is uncertain of its future as it has gotten old.
- "Experience if a student city-discounts for commuters and promoting local transport"

- "Regarding AI - I heavily dislike it and I think it's a waste. For a university that prides itself on environmentalism it's embarrassing that it hasn't taken a hard anti-AI stance."
- "Small version of first point at different campuses for students who are based on various campuses"
- "Student pantry and chill spaces"

Ann continued her slides with the general summary of the themes that have shown up thus far, surrounding dynamic, innovative and up to date learning/teaching, which may become one of the cores of the new strategic plan. Other concerns lie on the size of the university and how many students it wants to receive, digital transformation, student employability, mental health, campus infrastructure.

Ann remarked that independently of who has been giving feedback, it has all fallen into the same themes, and welcomed students to keep adding ideas/contributions to the email provided, finishing her presentation by thanking the audience and RM.

RM asked if anyone still has any questions:

- Q14. A student wanted to add to the AI and environmental issues point, as its wasteful nature goes against the university's values.

SW and Ann explained that there is still much to research on the topic, with SW suggesting this is an issue for RM to take to the University's sustainability committee. MP agreed and explained that the university's position is that AI is becoming essential for employment and cannot let students fall behind on it - it is necessary that students understand it, its limitations, and so on.

- Q14.1. Another student asked if the university could add pressure, for example, against Microsoft regarding the impact of AI.

RM replied that she will raise the issue to the relevant committees. SW added that this concern would have more weight if bodies like the UUK (Universities UK) could back it; that it would be better if an umbrella organisation took it rather than an individual university. Ann explained that they do have staff that sits on those organisations and can feed this into, but that change takes time.

Post-meeting note: Officers to continue to raise this in the relevant University forums.

Closing Remarks

RM thanked everyone for coming and instructed there is a code to give feedback.

- Q15. As one last point, a student stated that on top of the international nursing students, there are also local students that need help and think that they can only receive it for the tuition fees.

SW asked if he meant help with, for example, transportation costs (student confirmed) and that support against hardship exists, but their processes may be lengthy. SW also agreed more work needs to be done to make them simpler. Ann concurred.