

Worcester Students' Union's - All Student Meeting

23/02/2022 12:30-2:00pm, Urwin Lecture Theatre

Attendance

Panel

Al Linforth (AL (SU President), Isobel Price (IP (Vice President Student Activities)

Members

19 current students at University of Worcester and 2 Officer Trustees (listed above)

Also in attendance:

Sophie Williams (SW (Chief Executive), Clement Servini (CS (Marketing, Communications and Commercial Manager), Aimee Robinson-Clayton (ARC (Creative Media Coordinator) Jasmine-Alicia Clements (JC (Marketing and Communications Assistant) Megan Lee (ML (Democracy and Representation Assistant and Minute-taker), Sophie Smith (SS (Student Activities Manager), Hannah Heskin (HH(Student Activities Administrator), Barney Blake (BB (BUCS Sport Administrator), Mollie Parker (MP (Academic and Welfare Advisor)

1. Apologies:

There were no apologies received for the 2023/24 ASM.

2. Minutes

Welcome

AL explained photos would be taken throughout the meeting and that there was an area in the lecture theatre for anyone who didn't want to be photographed.

AL thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the All-Student Meeting (ASM), which is the SU's Annual General Meeting under its constitution and learn more about the priorities of the SU. AL explained that the aim of the meeting was to give students an insight into what the SU been doing to represent them and its aims for our future. They also explained that students would have an opportunity to feedback and ask any questions. AL highlighted how the SU values the student voice and puts students at the heart of its decisions. They ran through what would be covered on the agenda.

AL explained that some items required students in attendance to approve by a vote. They clarified, however, that the ASM must have 50 students present (excluding Officer Trustees) to be quorate. As 19 students were present, the meeting was not quorate. AL explained they would still progress through the agenda but that items would not be voted on for approval.

3. Review of All Student Meeting 14th February 2023

IP started the ASM by giving a quick review of the ASM 2023 and shared with students the actions and results in response to feedback received in last year's meeting. IP reassured students that even though last year's meeting didn't meet quoracy a lot positive and constructive conversations and actions emerged from the ASM.

IP talked through the questions and comments raised including:

- The lack of visibility of senior staff at the University and lack of awareness from students about who University senior leadership are and what they do.
- The channels available to students to provide direct feedback to the University and a lack of transparency about what is done with this feedback.
- The opportunities available to students to take part in extra-curricular activities, outside of BUCS competition and Varsity.

IP talked through the resulting actions:

- The introduction of Pizza with the PVC, giving students the opportunity to speak to members of the senior leadership team at the University. Topics discussed included transportation for nursing students, timetabling, catering, and the student experience at City Campus and Jenny Lind.
- The SU continues to have conversations with the University about making the senior leadership team more visible and the decisions they make concerning students more transparent.
- The SU hosted its first ever Home Varsity, giving everyone the chance to get involved in a fun and inclusive Rec Sport event, and will be bringing this back later this semester.

IP highlighted the importance and power of the student voice and the impact across the University it can have.

4. Review of accounts

Before starting her section of the ASM Sophie Williams (SW) explained her role as Chief Executive of the SU and how she supports the officers and manages the staff team. SW explained how the SU is a membership organisation and what that means.

SW moved on to the summary of the accounts for the year 1st August 2022 to 31st July 2023, with an explanation of the current financial situation of the higher education sector and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis over the last couple of years, as well as Covid

prior to that. SW explained the accounts and the general financial goals of the SU and how, as a charity, it is a not-for-profit organisation. SW explained where the SU generates income from, with the largest proportion being the annual block grant from the University, plus other smaller grants for specific projects such as for the Academic representation system. The second largest area is income from student activities and SW explained that Clubs and Societies' accounts are restricted, with the SU acting as the 'gatekeeper' for the membership contributions. The SU is unable to use those restricted funds for any general spend and the clubs and societies' money is ringfenced for use by them. The SU then receives income through sponsorship deals, media sales, and bar income. She also explained the financial reserves that the organisation needs to maintain (3 months of operating costs) and ran through the key areas of expenditure of the SU.

SW provided a summary of the 2022/23 accounts in that the SU had a total income of £991,083 and spent a total of £1,053,966 leaving a loss of £62,833 for the year. This was the first time the SU had made a deficit since she had joined the SU in 2015. SW explained the challenges the union has faced with wage inflation and the rise in the National Living Wage introduced by the government. Wages are the single biggest outlay of the SU. SW explained the measures the SU had put in place to offer student and core staff appropriate wage rises in line with the government's autumn budget statement in 2022 and to live in the current economic climate. This had represented a large, unexpected cost to the organisation but that this had been done out of necessity (with some rises being implemented ahead of government deadlines). She explained that the situation reflects the picture of many unions around the country.

SW explained that the SU still had healthy reserves but that the Union was also expecting a deficit at the end of the 2023/24 financial year of around about £35k, due to ongoing financial pressures, continued wage rises legislated by government in April 2024, and challenges around bar and other income.

SW explained that the SU is controlling all costs in their control very tightly, reviewing all contracts, and not necessarily replacing staff posts like for like when staff have left the organisation, which has placed pressures on resources.

A student asked why the SU did not close the bar as it appeared to be failing in terms of income. SW explained that the bar and venue within the SU also acts as a service as much as a commercial operation, as a safe place for students to meet and relax and that there was more at play in that decision than pure profit. She explained that any decision to close the bar would be made in consultation with the University, as well as the Trustee Board, with student insight. SW explained that there would need to be agreement about how the space (which is University owned) would be utilised if there was no bar offer and that would need to be done in partnership with the University. SW stated that hospitality venues across the country were facing challenges, and it was a possibility going forward that it would no longer be deemed a viable operation but that that decision had not been made yet. The SU Trustee Board and its finance sub-committee were monitoring the situation closely and the SU has a quarterly finance meeting with the University.

SW explained how the SU does not run the Costa in the Hangar, but it is the remit of Chartwells, the University's caterers and so that is an added dimension to consider as it is unable to run any competing food offer in the space.

A student asked whether we review our products to ensure we are meeting student demand which SW reassured them we do regularly, through sales insights, effective use of products (deals, cocktails etc), and close liaison with our suppliers through NUS.

A student asked how much the SU has in reserves and SW explained it was around which is around £300,000. SW explained that if the financial situation of the SU worsened, it would need to discuss with the University what services it was able to offer.

There was question on what student activities spend includes, which SW answered (mainly core staff, event costs).

Review of affiliations

AL explained that affiliations are the organisations to which the SU pays to be members, to support the delivery of our services to students.

AL outlined the three organisations with whom the SU currently affiliates to and the benefits of doing so:

- National Union of Students (NUS)

The expected cost is £13,880. AL provided members with an overview of the Union's affiliation to NUS, explaining it provides the Union with access to training and development for officers and staff, a voice at the national level, the Totum card (formerly NUS Extra), and its associated income and by purchasing through their national purchasing group, the Union can reduce the cost price of items sold in the bar.

AL opened the floor to questions, there were none received.

Due to quoracy there would be no vote for approval.

- British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS)

The cost this year will be £6,973. AL provided members with an overview of the Union's affiliation to BUCS, explaining it allows students to take part in a wide range inter-university competitive sports and access to support for sports development. NR opened the floor to questions, there were none received.

AL opened the floor to questions, there were none received.

Due to quoracy there would be no vote for approval.

- Advice UK

The cost is £290. AL provided members with an overview of the Union's affiliation to Advice UK. Being an Advice UK member means we are a part of the biggest network for independent advice centres in the United Kingdom. We have access to specialist training courses, professional insurance, and case management software at reduced rates, which all enables us to run an effective help and advice service.

AL opened the floor to questions, there were none received.

Due to quoracy there would be no vote for approval.

- Clubs' and Societies' Affiliations

AL explained that the SU's clubs and societies affiliate to a variety of organisations to help them run, some of which are free and some of which have fees which are paid by the club or society from their funds. AL noted that the SU is the legal entity affiliating to these organisations we also need to approve annually these affiliations. These are to the following organisations as follows and on screen:

- Archery GB
- Basketball England
- British American Football Association
- British Fencing
- British Mountaineering Council
- British Wheelchair Basketball
- Coppafeel
- County of Worcestershire Archery Association
- England Athletics
- England Lacrosse
- English Universities Sport
- Lawn Tennis Association
- PENSA International
- Rugby Football Union
- Students Rugby Football Union
- The Student Scout and Guide Organisation
- UCCF: The Christian Unions
- Volleyball England
- West Midland Archery Society
- Worcestershire FA

AL opened the floor to questions.

A student asked about some of the acronyms above which AL explained.

A student how the union benefits from the religious affiliations. AL explained why students affiliate to organisations as they can receive support from a national body that looks after societies from different unions, and can offer support, advice, and guidance.

The student followed up with a second question asking why the students need these affiliations. SW explained ways they support students providing examples such as risk assessments and how they can provide resources.

The student asked why the SU could not maximise use of the community as it appeared to be leaking money. SW clarified that the union is not leaking money and explained how club and society memberships that students pay are used to pay club and soc affiliations. SS added that many are free and reiterated that those that aren't free are paid for by clubs and societies own funds.

There was a conversation about the conduct of those present and how questions and statements might be better delivered.

Due to quoracy there would be no vote for approval.

The SU's New Strategic Framework 2023-28

SW explained the purpose of a longer-term strategic plan and how the SU had utilised the services of an Insight Manager from another SU to support our consultation and insight exercise with students. This represented excellent value for money and helped support staff within the sector, rather than using expensive external market research companies. SW also explained the consultation process, which led to feedback from 1,000 students through a range of means. SW explained that the resulting data reports identified five main strategies and trends that were of key importance to students. The SU staff and Officers then looked at these more closely and used them to finalise five strategic themes, as well as the SU's vision, mission, values, and enablers.

SW explained the SU's vision and Mission statement:

- Vision Empowering excellence, uniting diversity, and enriching student lives.
- To support, represent, and empower Worcester students.

SW talked through the 5 key strategic themes:

Key Strategic Theme 1 - Empowering and supporting students to prioritise their wellbeing.

Key Strategic Theme 2 - Understanding students' financial realities and reflecting that in what we do.

Key Strategic Theme 3 - Empowering students to have their say.

Key Strategic Theme 4 - Making sure our diverse student body is represented.

Key Strategic Theme 5 - Building connected student communities where students feel they belong.

SW then went on to talk through the SUs values and enablers:

- Being bold and brave

- Honest communication
- Keeping it simple
- Developing people
- Representative
- Inclusive and accessible

Enablers:

Culture - Positive, open, honest, and inclusive.

Partnerships - University, local community, sponsors, education sector.

Feedback and intelligence - Collate and act on students' feedback.

Sustainable practices - Learn from developments in sustainable practice.

SW then went on to explain that the organisation has set some Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), against which it will assess its performance and progress each year of the 5-year plan, the themes being:

- Satisfaction rates
- Student engagement
- Feedback and intelligence
- Support and outreach
- Events and activities
- Commercial performance

Officer Updates:

AL and IP provided updates on progress against their objectives in semester 1 and what their plans were for semester 2.

Al Linforth

Semester 1:

- **Cost of Living campaign** - Lobbied the university to decrease the cost of washing for those in halls, free period products through our partnership with Hey Girls, £760 worth of donations to the Community Cupboard, the return of Breakfast Club
- **Networks** - all Networks active on social media and delivering events and sessions, 11 of 14 committee roles filled, completed our first ever Network bursary cycle.
- **Multi-faith spaces** - led on a student consultation into a new multi-faith prayer space on St Johns campus, lobbying the University to improve facilities on Severn and City Campuses.
- **Student Futures Manifesto** - co-launched the manifesto alongside the University for World Mental Health Day
- **International student hardship** - lobbying the University to allow international students to access the Access to Learning (hardship) Fund

Semester 2:

- See the International Hardship Funding paper successfully passed through UEB.
- Contribute to the smooth running of the Academic Rep system and ensure we close the feedback loop with students.
- Support our Networks and help fill all committee roles for the 2024-25 academic year.
- Set solid foundations for future Officers by seeing through policies approved by Student Council.
- Support the delivery of Go Green Week
- Support the delivery of Race Equality Week
- Support the delivery of the Leadership Elections

Isobel Price

Semester 1:

- **Committee training** - it was great to see all our students back and engaging with training and team building.
- **Consent campaign** - encouraging positive conversations around consent and respect within the University of Worcester community.
- **Worcester's Gym Pathway and Workout Hour** - worked with the University Sport Facilities to launch the Women's Gym Pathway
- **Planning ahead** - Give it a Go Week, Varsity, Sports Kit Recycling campaign.

Semester 2:

- **Give it a Go Week** - encourage involvement in extra-curricular activities and promote everything done by clubs, societies, Networks, RAG, and TeamWorc Action
- **Sports Kit Recycling** - a new scheme has been introduced whereby people can donate old, and still usable, sports kit for students looking to take part in Rec Sport programs.
- **Varsity** - this year's campaign is #ShapeYourSport and is all about athlete activism, with teams coming together to campaign on what matters most to them.
- **Extra-curricular opportunities** - the return of Home Varsity, Battle of the Socs, and much more.

University strategy

IP and AI explained to the students that the university were currently in the process of developing their new long-term strategy and gave students a chance to feedback to ensure students have as much input as possible. The two statements the students were given were:

- Three things you think are great about the University, that they can use to encourage students to come here.
- Tell us three things you think the university should prioritise in the future.

Question time:

AL and IP reiterated to students how important it is that students hold the SU to account and gave the opportunity for students to ask any questions they might have.

Questions and their answers listed below:

- (i) A question was asked on what happened to Vice President Education, Seb James and why he left the SU.

AL explained that this was for personal reasons as explained in the statement released by the SU. A further question was asked if this was the SU's official stance. AL reiterated that it is the reason that Seb left.

- (ii) A question was asked about the length of the contract length with Kukri? SS explained that the contract length is 2 years which can be extended to 3 years, or it can be reduced to one.

- (iii) A student asked for some updates on the dates and timings of some upcoming events.

AL provided the dates for the student.

- (iv) There was a question from a student regarding a conduct issue they had experienced by another student and why the SU refused to deal with it or racism involving one of its Course Reps.

SW explained that she was unsure what the student was referring to and that the meeting was not an inappropriate place to discuss individual matters. SW explained that they could discuss the matter further after the meeting.

- (v) A question was asked about what home varsity was.

IP explained that it was a chance for any student to get involved in a recreational sport competition.

- (vi) A question was asked if the SU had reached a decision as to where TeamWorc Awards Night is going to be?

AL explained that the TeamWorc Awards are going to stay in the Hangar again this year and there was going to be an introduction of new awards to include more students.

- (vii) A question was asked if the SU can update the Team Worc points on the website.

SS explained that there have been some staff shortages and annual leave over Christmas but that this will be updated and that students can contact staff to find out their points tally. It was asked if the website could have live updates of points, but SS explained that this is not a functionality the SU website has.

- (viii) A student asked that, as sports clubs have Varsity with Gloucester university to take part in, could societies do something similar with Glos.

SS, HH and AL answered and said this is something that we are keen to facilitate going forwards and for students to get in touch if they want to discuss further and have ideas.

- (ix) A student asked a question about academic societies and expressed that the academic society they were part of only did activities and events that revolved around alcohol.

SW asked HH to look into the student group mentioned and get in touch with them to see if there was scope for more CPD activities.

- (x) A question was asked on where the multifaith prayer space was in the University.

AL explained where they are located at City and one on St John's campus (in the Thomas Telford Building). A student explained that they had spoken to a member of university staff, and they are trying to locate a room for a multifaith prayer room at Jenny Lind. AL confirmed they had also been working with the University on adequate facilities at Jenny Lind.

- (xi) A student asked a question about small societies and if there is something they can do that is more competitive.

HH explained that they could get involved with home varsity, battle of the socs for example. HH encouraged societies to reach out to other Universities. SS recommended working with local people and other universities that are local to Worcester, for example the Climbing and Mountaineering club arrange climbing with Warwick university.

Closing Remarks

To end the meeting, IP and AL thanked everyone for attending and highlighted how feedback from students and hearing their voices helps the SU to progress and help provide students with the best possible university experience. They asked that students continue to provide feedback throughout the year and get involved with everything going on in the Union.

Meeting ended.