

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Tuesday 26th March 2024 – Via MS Teams, 17:00**

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present:

Al Linforth (Chair and President) – AL
Isobel Price (VP Student Activities) - IP
Beky Williams (Lay Trustee and Deputy Chair) – BW
Erica Burke (Lay trustee) - EB
Erin Boddice (Student Trustee) – Ebo
Tim Young (Student Trustee) - TY
Mel Brittain (Lay Trustee – joined during SUSS item) – MB

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (SU Chief Executive) – SW
John Abell (Minutes)
Robert Cox (Director of Finance and Commercial) - RC

Absent:

Eryn Orme (Student Trustee) - EO

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising

No matters arising.

Finance Items (moved up the agenda).

6. Students' Union Superannuation Scheme (SUSS) AGM 2024

SW shared a presentation on key points from the SUSS AGM in March. The SUSS scheme is now 53% funded, which is higher than previous due to the rise in interest rates. Queen Margaret, Edinburgh, and Exeter SUs have joined Manchester SU in exiting the scheme and many more are considering it.

There is a worry from the SUSS Trustees that there are a number of institutions (they estimate 25 to 30) are in serious financial difficulty, which will be impacting on their SUs. Also, of interest from the meeting is that NUS UK (principal employer) are considering leaving the scheme. NUS Charity appear to be happy to take over as principal employer in this scenario, albeit they have much less of an overall liability.

SW has made enquiries with the scheme and to exit the scheme would cost WSU £370,000 (figure correct at Jan 2024). It is felt highly unlikely the University would fund this for the SU. The worry is that soon there may be only smaller SUs left in the scheme with fewer resources to manage the risk. SW felt there was still a level of uncertainty over 'orphan liabilities' of those leaving the scheme (either through insolvency or when solvent) and in which scenarios remaining participating employers would be required to take them on.

EB asked what the big risks around the scheme were – SW was worried on the number of SUs considering leaving the meeting and if NUS UK left and the impact on Unions like WSU who would be left in it. It would no doubt be better to exit the scheme but we do not have the funds currently to do so. RC said his worry was the management of the scheme due to its levels of funding.

SW agreed to send the presentation around after the meeting.

MB joined the meeting.

7. Monthly Management Accounts – Feb 2024

There were no questions on the accounts, and they were approved.

8. 2024/25 Draft Budget Submission

RW presented various options relating to staff pay which is the key element of the budget submission, without any increase in SU block grant (likely to be £600k again). This current year the staff wage bill is £611K which is higher than the block grant and not an ideal situation. All options lead to a deficit at the end of the 24/25 financial year. [Commercial in Confidence].

A wide-ranging discussion on salary bands, increments, and reward took place and a clear steer emerged that the Union cannot currently afford to recruit staff positions with an advertised salary band but, instead, should do so at a flat salary point.

It was agreed that the 2024/25 budget and salary matters would be discussed further at the May sub-committees with recommendations taken to the next Board meeting. A final decision on any award for staff not impacted by the minimum wage rises would be made at that meeting for implementation in August.

9. Finance Procedures Manual and Reserves Policy

RC noted that the Manual had major input from the Finance Sub-Committee and that the reserves policy was unchanged.

IP noted a redundant role which RC agreed to remove. The updated Financial Procedures Manual and Reserves Policy was approved.

RC left the meeting.

5. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW presented their report presuming it was read. SW noted:

- On track with the budget forecast.
- Staff roles are being evaluated as and when people leave.
- Homeworking had been reviewed, in terms of any requirements on the organisation around health and safety. The University had advised that it is staff's responsibility to ensure they have an adequate working environment at home.
- The Hangar has been performing well recently (Varsity and Northern Soul night).
- CEO Appraisal has been postponed due to illness.
- Positive that we have an international President next year.
- University delaying many decisions due to the financial landscape and changes in senior leadership.
- Advice are performing well as a team implementing good initiatives and collaborative work with the University.
- Elections went well (though candidate numbers were low which is worrying and is a sector concern).

BW noted this could be a post-covid issue with young people less willing to engage with strangers.

- There is ongoing concern around the Freedom of Speech legislation though this is being taken seriously by the management team and a new code of practice would be developed using sector guidance.
- An end of year survey is being delivered to assess impact of the new strategic framework and student satisfaction.
- A meeting with the VC was held recently which went well. SW stressed how the SU could support the University.

There were no questions.

Reporting items

10. Annual Report of External Speakers

There were no questions.

11. Board Sub-Committees

HR sub-committee was cancelled due to illness.

Finance sub-committee highlights were presented by AL.

12. Officers' report

IP presented their report:

- Worcester won Varsity 13 – 4 with great support from the SU team.

- Period Dignity is being paused for Easter due to diminishing supplies from the provider.
- SU Networks have been good over the last few months.
- SU Elections went well with 3 new officers for next year – Ruttuja Mane, Elliot Atkinson, and Jack Lambert - who have already met with the Vice-Chancellor.
- The new officers will be invited to attend the next Board meeting.

13. Executive Committee Verbal Update

IP noted that:

- 2 new societies were approved (Mooting and Surgical)
- Dudley campus was discussed.

14. Student Council Summary

AL noted that:

- Several policies were discussed.
- Chartwells and catering were discussed again. Students were likely to be contacting University senior management directly.

15. Board of Governors summary

AL noted that there have been 2 meetings since the last Board meeting. Both focussed on the perilous financial and political landscape in Higher Education. There is hope from the University that Dudley Campus will lead to a rise in regional recruitment. The University is working on its position for art and culture in the region which is promising.

16. Any Other Business

SW asked the Board if they would be happy for the Director of Representation and Membership Services to attend the meeting on 28th May to deliver the Elections Report and reflect on their 1st year in role. The Board agreed.

SW noted that student trustee recruitment has started for 3 roles and it is hoped some new trustees will be in attendance at the next meeting.

Meeting closed 18:45

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
SW to share SUSS Presentation	April	SW
2024/25 budget / pay to be discussed at next sub-committees	May	SW