

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Wednesday 26th November 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
Tim Young (Student Trustee) - TY

In attendance:

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

Apologies

Mel Brittain (Lay Trustee) – MB
Erica Burke (Lay Trustee) - EB

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies received for EB (Lay Trustee) and MB (Lay trustee) and it was noted that TY needed to leave the meeting at 6pm. RM confirmed that the meeting was quorate, with two Officer and one Lay Trustee present.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

3. Matters arising

MB to have a separate meeting with Knox Cropper if required – **COMPLETE and MB satisfied with accounts**

SW to pass on the CV of the candidate to be an external trustee to BW and RM to consider – **COMPLETE and interview has been arranged for the following day.**

SW to add business development and entrepreneurial questions to the next Lay trustee interview – **As needed, dependant on skill gaps upon recruitment.**

BW /SW to engage with the Council to see if there is any hardship or opportunity funding available to students – BW updated that she had looked into this with little available in Worcestershire (unlike Herefordshire where there seem to be more funds). The Councillors have a Divisional Fund Scheme which may help with particular areas of hardship. SW confirmed that she and the VPSA looked into this funding last year for the Community Cupboard but had missed the deadline so we

can look again. BW suggested the Union could look for funding around being a 'warm space' in Winter for the local community. SW agreed to look into this.

SW to bring the budget forecast to the next Board including how many months the SU would not meet the reserves target. –**On the agenda at Item 7.**

SW to review the operational plan for SMART targets – **Done.** SW reported back that often multiple tasks were contained under one objective so she had labelled them on the dashboard as either fully, partially, or not smart. She estimated that 60% of objectives/tasks were definitely SMART and so this needed to be borne in mind when agreeing next year's operational plan. Many of the objectives that were partially SMART needed retaining so we needed to work on how to measure these more effectively.

Network bye-law to be revised at the next meeting due to changes in the Code of Conduct - **On the agenda at Item 8.**

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

None.

5. Chief Executive Officer Report

SW presented their report presuming it was read.

- SW noted that student engagement in the SU remains good, with a good atmosphere, but wet sales are still low.
- SW made it clear when attending the recent University Audit Committee, the concerns of the Board around reserves and the ongoing financial challenges. We were complimented on an excellent and comprehensive end of year report that demonstrated a high level of activity.
- Staffing challenges continue and we have just had the resignation of the Bar and Venue Manager, which is a loss to the organisation. There is a need for balance in terms of saving money but also not downsizing too much and retaining staff. Other members of SMT will need to assume responsibilities, such as Health and Safety and facilities matters whilst we decide on the best way forward and the Bar and Venue Supervisor will be supported.
- SW confirmed that she has a meeting booked with the Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor Academic on 9th January to discuss the current situation.
- We will be making changes to the opening hours of the bar, just deciding on exact hours.
- Student staff are being utilised to alleviate shortages in Marketing and Communications.

- The Student Activities Manager and VPSA are currently looking after society matters which is not ideal and we are looking for a more longer-term solution.
- Work is ongoing to ensure the organisation is compliant with the Worker Protection Act 2023 and a policy and action plan around preventing sexual harassment is in development. SW is liaising with the University on their intentions around staff training.
- We are drafting a Staff Engagement Survey for implementation in Spring, based on external surveys utilised in the past.
- We are still staffing the City Campus Hub, although we faced difficulties with this last week due to staff illness. The feedback has been positive.
- Help and Advice remains very busy and has done over 60 talks to different cohorts about the service, which is around 2,000 students. Each talk results in new contacts to the service.
- We have 14, maybe 15 new academic societies, which is very good news. Student groups have organised around 45 events and 4 trips, which is a lot of activity.
- We have agreed our EDI Action Plan for the year, with a lot around accessibility of our services.
- Progress against the organisation's KPIs were attached as an appendix, as well as the University's draft strategic plan.

Approval Items

6. Year End Accounts 2023/24 and Management Letter

These were approved, following the meeting with MB and the auditors.

7. Monthly Management Accounts -October 2024

These were approved and no questions raised.

SW went on to talk about the projections she has been asked to bring to the meeting. The latest forecast, were the Union not to re-recruit the 3 members of staff who had left or were expecting to leave, would be reduced from £87k to £16k, a saving of £71k. That includes the national insurance and minimum wage rises from April, and is made up largely of savings in core and student staff costs and transport for sport because students now give a higher contribution. Other small savings include £700 on staff savvy, all offset by forecasted budget income on bar sales being reduced by £37,000.

With this budget we would drop down below our reserve levels for one month in July, to c£143K and we would need to be about £197k. But we would go back up again in August to £203K once we got the first instalment of the block grant.

[Commercial in Confidence].

SW clarified that key decisions were around maintaining reserves levels or replacing staff as we are unable to do both and this is something she will need to discuss with

the VC in January. The core staff team will now be at 15, which is the lowest since SW began in role.

[Commercial in Confidence] BW asked where the Union stood in terms of breaching its reserves policy from a charity compliance perspective.

SW clarified that is an internal policy that we set. The Charity Commission recommends six months, which we would struggle to meet and our policy is in line with most others SUs. Our policy is that if we breach the reserves for six months or more, we would be required to have an action plan, almost an escape plan of sorts.

BW stated that she would prefer to have the expertise of MB and thoughts from EB too. SW confirmed that a Finance Sub Committee had taken place the week before and that whilst these specific projection figures weren't available for the meeting, their general nature were discussed. We need to think as much about 2025/26 as we do 24/25 as decisions we make now will likely be affected by inflation and more rises in costs. Having recruitment processes planned would provide some optimism for staff.

BW suggested meeting with DG and arranging an extraordinary Trustee meeting if necessary, with EB and MB present.

Action – SW to arrange if felt necessary, in discussion with BW.

BW also suggested that SW needed to compile a list for DG of the things the SU was unable to do if it didn't replace the staff, at a time when we are committed to City and Dudley campuses. Discussions included our role in Open Days, as well as prioritising what University meetings to attend.

Action – SW to arrange.

EA raised concerns about the need for the officers for 25/26 to have good inductions which may be affected by being short-staffed. SW felt that a good induction would always be prioritised for the officers but acknowledged that it came at a time of year when staff were tired from a busy year and ready for a summer holiday, which isn't ideal.

8. Updated Bye Laws 5 and 6

SW explained the recent, minimal changes to these Bye Laws, following the updating of the Officers and Members Code of Conduct in Autumn.

The Board approved the updates to Bye Laws 5 and 6.

9. Risk Register

SW explained the updates were mainly minor and to the controls in place to mitigate risks. She had switched the likelihood and impact scores of 5.1 and 5.2 under finance, leaving the residual score the same, and had reduced 6.4 (human resources) to medium from high, as issues related to pay seem to have reduced, albeit we still face challenges in terms of staff retention.

Board approved the Risk Register.

10. Annual Statement of Legal Compliance.

SW explained the purpose of the document in keeping the organisation on track with various legal requirements and the latest updates.

The Board approved the Annual Statement of Legal Compliance.

11. Matrix of Delegated Responsibilities

SW explained the purpose of the document and the latest updates. SW noted that work to review the constitution of the Union would commence in June 2025.

The Board approved the updated Matrix.

12. Draft Annual Impact Report 2023/24

SW explained the document was a draft version but gave an idea of style and commended the student staff involved in its design. The Board agreed it was a very attractive report and approved it in its draft form.

Reporting Items

13. Board Sub-Committees

- 13.1 HR Sub Committee took place last week. EA noted that SW had covered today some of what was discussed, such as staffing matters and draft sexual harassment policy, but other things discussed were improved reasonable adjustment processes for staff, and a need to be mindful of our staffing capacity in trying to do too much, policy wise.
- 13.2 Finance Sub Committee – RM noted much of the meeting concerned similar issues around staffing and rising staff costs, as well as feedback from the quarterly meeting with the university, trading performance for 24-25, the progress of the audit tender, and the recruitment of MB's replacement.

14. Officers Report

JL presented the report, which included:

- Events for Diwali
- Sub Committees of Student Council and the SU's Sustainability Committee
- Breakfast with the SU (engaging almost 500 students so far) and preparation for the launch of Kitchen Korner
- Hosting employability sessions in the SU by Careers
- Supporting new and adopted societies.
- RAG week events
- Movember
- Planning for Varsity

- Promoting neurodiversity
- Organising the Rep Conference for January
- Working with the PVCs on issues around RAPs for students (Reasonable Adjustment plans)
- Arranging for students to have their questions answered about timetabling
- Training Department Reps and arranging another Rep social

15. Executive Committee Summary

JL presented the report, which included:

- Approvals of new societies.
- Outreach in Dudley and the Business School
- Idea passed through the Ideas Forum on re-instating a language module

16. Student Council Summary

EA presented the report, including:

- A presentation from the 2 University PVC Academics on their roles and priorities. There was some interest expressed about the University's retention plan and they offered to attend again to provide more insight.
- Current student issues including gaps in University communications.
- The financial issues of the Union and how students can support us.
- Policy and Bye Law approval.

The next meeting is in December.

17. Board of Governors Summary

RM presented the report, which included a report from the VC on the University's current financial and recruitment situation, the University's draft strategy, and AI. Officers had also attended Finance and Development, Audit and Risk and People and Culture Sub Committee meetings.

18. Any other business

SW updated the Board on progress with recruitment of a Lay Trustee with finance experience. BW was keen that we progressed recruitment for that role, regardless of the intentions of the current candidate. SW updated that MB had identified a couple of appropriate candidates whom she was going to contact.

BW expressed concern that she was the only Lay Trustee in attendance at the meeting and SW confirmed that it was the third meeting in recent times where only one Lay Trustee was present. BW felt consideration now needed to be given to increasing the number of Lay Trustees to address the risk of insufficient lay expertise at meetings, which could impact governance and decision-making. It was discussed by the group who agreed that the composition should be changed to up to 4 Lay Trustees and up to 3 Student Trustees (rather than 3 Lay Trustees and 4 Student Trustees), particularly considering the challenges in recruiting Student Trustees.

Action – SW to look at practicalities of affecting this change (within the Union’s governing documents etc).

Meeting closed 19:00

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
Look into possibility of funding for SU to become a ‘warm space’ in Winter for local community	SW	ASAP
Arrange extraordinary meeting if felt necessary to discuss financial matters with EB and MB present.	SW	In discussion with BW
SW to compile a list of what the SU would be unable to do if it did not replace staff for DG	SW	For meeting on 9 th Jan
SW to look at practicalities of changing composition of the Board, switching Lay and Student Trustees, in the Union’s governance documents	SW	ASAP

Next Meeting Wednesday 5th February 2025 at 5pm (Teams)