

Students' Union Trustee Board

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Trustee Board
Tuesday 28th May 2024 – Via MS Teams, 17:00**

Present:

Al Linforth (Chair and President) - AL
Isobel Price (Vice President Student Activities) - IP
Erin Boddice (Student Trustee) - EBo
Timothy Young (Student Trustee) - TY
Eryn Orme (Student Trustee) - EO
Erica Burke (Lay Trustee) - EBU

In attendance:

Sophie Williams (Chief Executive) - SW
Antonia Rossiter-Eaglesfield (Director of Representation and Membership Services)
- ARE
Lewis Lay (Minute Taker)

Observers:

Elliot Atkinson – VP Education Elect
Jack Lambert – VP Student Activities Elect

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies were received by Beky Williams (Lay Trustee), Mel Brittain (Lay Trustee) and Ruttuja Mane (Observer – President Elect).

The meeting was quorate.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes from the previous meeting were received and approved.

3. Matters arising

- (i) SW had shared SUSS Presentation with members of the board.

SW updated the board on recent developments with SUSS from a recent CEO/NUS catch up. A number of Unions have progressed with a paid request for an exact Section 75 buyout figure (which generally means they are serious about coming out) and one other Union's institution have bought them out. NUS UK have not got as far as paying for their exact S75 figure. Unions leaving will add pressure on unions remaining in the scheme.

4. Declaration or Conflicts of Interest

No new declarations or conflicts were made.

5. Director of Representation and Membership Services

ARE presented the board with reflections on the performance of the recent elections process. Key points noted where:

- Candidate numbers were 5 with 2 of the 3 positions contested. This is lower than aim of all positions contested with at least 3 candidates.
- Voter turnout was 13.5% which was higher than the previous year's of 11.5%.
- Welfare initiatives were positive with voters, candidates, and staff. They included drop-ins during nominations made easier through an online booking tool. Revised wellbeing training that encompassed wider self-care skills. Candidate breakfasts and developing wellbeing spaces by taking over two rooms in the SU to be used by candidates as a relaxed space. Also ran a wellbeing and debrief event at the end of voting with candidates before results were announced.
- SU aimed to increase candidate diversity to be more inclusive and reflective of the wider student population. Prior to elections feedback workshops were held with Welfare and Inclusion Council that raised feedback around language, lack of confidence, time commitment, financial barriers, and, for some, a mistrust of the principle of free and fair elections. Initiatives were conducted in response including a dedicated international student hub with information specific to international students running in the election. Campaign team training was offered with 2 teams engaging.
- Diversity of candidates was recorded through the NUS Diversity survey, in which all candidates participated. Candidates' diversity has improved with this year 40% white and 60% other ethnicity. 40% women, 40% defined as LGBT and 40% said they had a disability. However, all candidates were aged between 18-21.
- Insight from candidates included describing experience in three words with fun, learning, and scary being common responses.

Moving forward to 2025 team will continue to engage with a range of student networks and Student Council sub-councils at the start of semester one and continue to identify and address barriers. Will also aim to provide further support for mature students and students with disabilities.

ARE presented the board with their reflections from their first 18 months. These reflections noted:

- Strength: WSU is small but mighty: noted the level of work that has been possible with a small sized team. Work has been remarkable and recognised on a national level with coverage on platforms like WONKHE.
- Strength: Community: strong sense of community amongst students and staff. This feels unique to Worcester and is something that larger unions struggle with.

- Strength: Collaborative: teams across the organisation having a good sense of collaboration on areas of work like varsity, elections, and student voice conference.
- Development: Focus: the team is small but mighty but there are times where we probably take on too much leading to pressures especially with staff vacancies or absence as it is felt in the team. Need to be realistic in what we can achieve.
- Development: Recruitment: has been challenging which has also been noted across the sector. Will continue to determine best approach for those interested in coming to work for Worcester and embodies our values.
- Development: Technology: looking at using platforms and systems better to automate and streamline areas of work.

Questions and observations:

EBu questioned voter turnout % and whether a target had been set. ARE noted the aim is 20% which represents higher end of national SU average. It was noted that this year's turnout % is up from last year indicating an upward trajectory. Previously, the SU had achieved 19%. ARE noted that with the General Election there is a hope of building engagement from messaging around being an active citizen.

ARE left the meeting.

6. August 2024 pay award/ 2024/25 Budget submission (paper) [Commercial in Confidence]

7. Chief Executive Officer Report (paper)

SW presented their update to the board presuming that the paper has been read. Key points note included:

- Not part of the paper but SW updated that a review of the Union's Byelaws was in progress following the new strategic framework and our aim to remove bureaucracy wherever possible. Other changes included bursaries for Networks which needed reflecting in the Bye Laws. This work has not been possible prior to this meeting due to capacity and so, ideally this is to be looked at over the summer ready for the new academic year. The Board agreed to receive the updated Bye Laws over email when they are ready, to be approved.
- Budget is on track and the team continue to look at cost savings with income lower than forecast. Next year's budget will be realistic, not aspirational.
- The Hangar continues to achieve student engagement with varsity, quiz nights, as well as hosting external events. Retrospective payments from the NUS trading consortium indicated we are doing better than many other SUs.
- Discussions ongoing with University over use of The Hangar over the summer for summer schools.
- Work of the Union is being recognised nationally with the Union being nominated in the NUS national Best Bar None awards in three categories.
- SW and the HR and Finance Administrator have been busy reviewing the core and student staff handbook and several policies therein. There is also a

review of the HR platform being used by the organisation (Staff Savvy), with us testing alternatives. Also looking into external HR support (e.g. retainers) but think we may be able to access the same level of service through Radar, which we gain through our contract with Endsleigh Insurance, which is positive. Overall, we hope to make cost savings for 2024/25.

- Recruitment continues to be challenging with a position current having to be readvertised due to unsuitable candidates and poor interviews. The role has been renamed and looking at other advertising options to attract applicants.
- Work is continuing to finalise the officer elect's comprehensive induction.
- Nationally a general election has been announced and there is uncertainty on what this will mean for the sector and current developments such as freedom of speech. We may still need to create a code of practice which will involve guest speaker processes.
- Attended Critical Incident Planning event based in the University, with The Hangar chosen as the focal point of the incident. There were several regional stakeholders present and the day provided much food for thought.
- Help and advice remains busy and achieving positive wins for students.
- Sport has performed well in BUCS. However, we are currently looking into the financial support given to sport. Potentially may need to decrease transport subsidies from the current level of 50%. BUCS affiliation and team entry fees are increasing so we need to decide carefully what teams we enter into what. SW and Robert Cox are now on a Task and Finish Group supporting the BUCS Exec to decide a new model for calculating affiliation fees. Also working with regional organisations at setting up a west midlands league for students not in BUCS (or as an alternative for the lower leagues in BUCS, which doesn't tend to offer the best experience). Performance sport is also currently under review by the University.
- Insights survey is out with around 250 responses to date with aim of over 300. Responses so far are positive with free text comments noting the SU provides opportunities to make friends, a sense of safety, and international students noting feeling welcomed and at home.
- Course Experience Survey results also positive with most schools scoring the union over 90% overall satisfaction with the SU, with exception of Business that has brought the overall score down.

SW took this opportunity to note this was AL and IP last meeting that thank them for their work this year being an officer role vacant.

No questions or observations were raised by the board.

Action: CEO to review byelaws and send to board for virtual decision if implementation is required over the summer.

8. Operational plan 2023/24

SW presented their update to the board presuming that the paper has been read. Key points note included:

- Performance dashboard has been working well for insights and indicates that 54% of activities achieved 80%-100% of target.

- Noted that volunteering and networks continue to struggle with engagement. Similar trends seen in other Students' Unions.
- Outreach continues to be embedded as the union develops through its 5-year strategic plan.
- Overall, the first year of the framework has provided a good base.

No questions or observations were raised by the board.

9. EDI Annual Report

The board noted the report with no discussion.

Action: CEO to update document links in report for publishing.

10. Appointed of Deputy Chair of Trustee Board

AL presented the item to the board noting Beky Williams interest in continuing as the Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board.

Decision: Board approved Beky Williams as Deputy Chair of the Trustee Board.

11. Ratification of Bank Mandate signatories and Companies House Directors

SW presented the item to the board. It was noted that it is recommended that Lay Trustees are registered as Directors on Companies House and then Sophie Williams and Robert Cox (Director of Finance and Commercial) are the Bank Mandate signatories.

Decision: Board approved Lay Trustees as Companies House Directors and CE and Director of Finance and Commercial as Bank Mandate signatories.

12. Monthly Management Accounts – April 2024

SW presented the management accounts to the board for approval.

No questions or observations were raised by the board.

Decision: Board approved Aprils management accounts.

13. Schedule of Agenda items 2024/25

SW presented the paper to the board presuming that it was read. A proposed amendment to more honorary life memberships to March's meeting to better align with awards timeline.

AL noted that it makes sense to the Honorary Life Members item to be held in March.

Decision: Board approved schedule with minor amendment to move Honorary Life Members item to March's meeting.

14. Honorary Life Membership Awards

IP verbally presented the board with an overview of the three honorary life members proposed for ratification by the board. The included information relating to the individual's engagement and commitment to the students' union during their time as a student.

No questions or observations were raised by the board.

Decision: Board approved Honorary Life Members.

15. Annual report of complaints

The Board noted the report with no discussion.

16. Elections report

The Board noted the report with no discussion.

17. Board Sub-Committees

AL updated the board on the activities of the Finance subcommittee. It was noted that the meeting has been rearranged for 29th May 2024 and the board were informed of agenda items including a commercial update, 2024/25 budget, and external auditors tender.

IP updated the board on the activities of the HR and Remuneration Subcommittee. The committee discussed:

- Looking into alternative HR platforms to Staff Savvy.
- Looking at various options relating to external HR advisors, including CIPD and comparing to services offered free by Rradar (through our contract with Endsleigh).
- Review of core and student staff handbooks and policies such as Special Leave policies.

No questions or observations were raised by the Board.

18. Officers' Report

IP presented their update to the board presuming that the paper has been read. Key points note included:

- Noted the last officer report from the current team.
- Student Voice Conference took place, with several talks and workshops that were beneficial and new this year. Attendance numbers were lower than the number that had RSVP'd but it was a positive event for those who came.

- Team Worc Awards celebrations went well with new awards like Change-maker and EDI.
- Student Choice awards happened recognising teaching and support staff.
- RAG raised over £12k which is very good with cost-of-living issues. Voting currently open for next years RAG charity.

No questions or observations were raised by the Board.

19. Executive Committee Minutes

IP updated the board of the activities of the Executive Committee. This included updates from the officers on their objectives with the majority complete and the remaining not possible due to operational or other barriers. Handover will be taking place soon with Officers' elect to discuss anything they would like to carry on.

It was also noted the SW attended the Nursing audit for delivery at the Dudley campus. The University passed this without recommendations and so there is now a need to deliver services to students at the Dudley campus. This has started with updates to the website covering information for students on the campus.

No questions or observations were raised by the Board.

20. Student Council Summary

AL updated the board on the activities of Board of Governors. Key points of note included:

- Noted attendance was lower with all council meetings this year – perhaps as a result of them being in person opposed to hybrid but feeling that in person meetings are more beneficial.
- Gave officer reports.
- Approved honorary life memberships.
- Updated progress around policy motions, including for basic life support and the University mental health charter.
- Noted a lot of policies and actions await information or development from the University.
- Director of Representation and Membership Services gave an update on the SU leadership elections.
- Report on national conference was presented to council by EA, which was very interesting.
- Council provided further feedback on Chartwells and catering on campus which as been compiled and sent to the university procurement team (who requested it).
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No questions or observations were raised by the Board.

21. Board of Governors Summary

AL updated the board on the activities of Board of Governors. Key points of note included:

- Board of governors has met twice since last Trustee Board with 1 full meeting and 1 development session.

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No questions or observations were raised by the board.

22. Any other business

(i) Proposed 2024/25 meeting dates

SW asked the board if there were any concerns with proposed meeting dates. No concerns were raised by the board.

Action: 2024/25 meeting dates to be placed into members' calendars.

(ii) Student Trustee recruitment

SW updated the board on the recruitment position for student trustees. It was noted that the role has been advertised through email, social media, and other channels with very little response. This means the Board could start next year with one student trustee. Further recruitment attempts will be made over the summer and Welcome Week. It was noted that previously student trustee recruitment has been consistent and successful, and the current challenge may be a reflection on how time poor students are.

(iii) Student Choice Awards (SCAs)

SW informed the board regarding discussions and developments with the SCAs. It was noted that the University provided £400 to deliver the awards this year after much discussion but no administrative support. The Union has received negative feedback from academics and two Heads of Schools about aspects of the awards, some of which was highly patronising. This has been a feature each year of the awards. We estimate the SCAs cost c.£1500 to deliver (before the cost of venue staff time). The recent University staff survey indicates staff do not feel they are rewarded or recognised and the SCAs has been noted as one of the only recognition opportunities. This leaves the union in a difficult position. Costings and negative feedback year on year from academics means it is felt no longer appropriate or tolerable for the SU to continue and would be more appropriate for the university to run themselves. This has been fed back to the Provost prior to an in person meeting about the awards.

No questions or observations were raised by the board.

The board noted that this was the last meeting for Officer Trustees, as well as EO and EBo. The board thanked them for their work and participation with the Board during their term of office.

Meeting closed: 18:46

Summary of Actions:

Action	For	To be completed by
CEO to keep board updated on any significant changes with SUSS position		SW
Pay award and budget item to be taken to finance committee and communicated to full board.		SW
CEO to review byelaws and send to board for virtual decision if implementation is required over the summer		SW
CEO to update document links in EDI End of Year report for publishing		SW
2024/25 Meeting dates to be placed into calendars		SW

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