INTRODUCTION

Semester 2 has been a month of momentum for the USU. Wellbeing Week engaged over 350 students, Creative Month launched to sold-out workshops and more than 450 gallery visits, and the V-Team has grown to 1,524 active volunteers, up 56% on last year. With the Manning Night Markets and a bigger-than-ever Scream Fest just around the corner, there is plenty more to look forward to. We have also continued to work closely with the University on Campus Futures and SSAF, and the Board has reaffirmed its commitment to a welcoming campus for students of all backgrounds. It is a genuinely exciting me to be part of the USU, and I look forward to building on this momentum together over the rest of the semester.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT

Wellbeing

During Week 3 – the University's Wellbeing and Welcome week – the USU delivered a program of wellness activations designed to support students' physical, social, and mental wellbeing at an important point in the semester. The program included a week-long fitness step challenge, Goat Yoga in the Refectory, a Consent Labs workshop held alongside a non-alcoholic beer garden, and a mini–Run Club. Together, these activities engaged over 350 students and offered a range of ways to participate, from active and social events to educational sessions.

The USU has also extended the operating hours of Food Hub, its service providing free food to students, to 9am–4pm. This extension increases access for students across a broader part of the day, including those with early or late classes, and reflects the USU's ongoing commitment to addressing cost-of-living pressures facing the student community.

Creative Month

Creative Month has launched strongly, with early results demonstrating high levels of student engagement and program quality. The launch event agracted almost 300 students, and all three Week 1 workshops sold out, with more than 100 agendees in total. These results point to strong demand for hands-on creative programming among our members.

Engagement has also extended well beyond scheduled events. The Art Walk has recorded more than 250 QR code engagements, showing that students are interacting with the program independently as they move around campus. The Creative Awards gallery has agracted more than 450 student visits, and over 150 USU members have entered the members' draw, which also supports the visibility and value of USU membership.

Partner satisfaction is similarly encouraging, with cultural partners already expressing interest in returning for the 2027 program. This provides a positive foundation for expanding the program's reach and deepening its cultural partnerships in future years. The remaining major events are the Pocket Art Market on 21 September and the USU Creative Awards and closing celebration on 24 September, which will bring the month to a close.

Volunteering & the V-Team

The V-Team continues to grow at a significant rate. There are currently 1,524 active volunteers in 2026, a 56% increase on the 977 active volunteers recorded in 2025. A further 185 new volunteers were onboarded in the last month alone, indicating that interest in volunteering remains strong well into the year.

Volunteers contributed 1,136.59 hours in August, bringing the year-to-date total to 6,152.65 hours. These figures reflect both the scale of the program and the substantial contribution volunteers make to USU events, services, and community initiatives.

The V-Team also agended a bush regeneration working group with the Inner West Council, which focused on gardening and education about the surrounding wetlands. Fourteen student volunteers contributed 52 hours to this activity. Opportunities of this kind broaden the program's impact beyond campus and strengthen the USU's relationships with the local community.

Upcoming Events

Preparations are well underway for the 2026 Manning Night Markets, scheduled for 14 and 15 October. Food vendor participation has now been confirmed, and the event layout has been refined following lessons learned from last year's inaugural event, with the aim of improving flow and the overall agendee experience. As part of the USU's ongoing student support initiatives, up to 600 complimentary student meals will be made available across the two days through a voucher system, ensuring the event remains accessible to students regardless of their financial circumstances.

Planning for Scream Fest 2026, the USU's annual Halloween event on 31 October, is also progressing well. Building on the success of last year's event, capacity has been increased from 4,500 to 6,000 agendees through an updated site configuration. This represents a significant expansion of one of the USU's flagship events and will allow more students to take part.

Sustainability

The FOGO (food organics and garden organics) pilot across USU outlets is progressing well, with 100% compliance achieved to date. Baseline data is now being recorded, which will allow the USU to measure the pilot's impact and inform decisions about its future expansion. Two volunteer day trips were also delivered at Inner West Council bush regeneration and clean-up sites, connecting the USU's sustainability and volunteering programs.

Looking ahead, planning has commenced for 2027 SSAF applications. Proposals under development include a second-hand bookstore and equipment pop-up, the return of Enviro Week, and open workshop opportunities for students. These initiatives are intended to make sustainable choices more practical and affordable for students while building engagement with environmental issues on campus. The Huskee reusable cup trial with the University remains in progress, although implementation is now likely to launch in 2027.

FINANCE

Year-to-Date Performance

Year-to-date net income at the end of August is $663,000 ahead of budget. August delivered net income of $43,000 before investment losses, compared with a budgeted loss of $157,000. The USU continues to steer through macro headwinds on the supply side, and management has continued to monitor trading conditions closely.

Graduations

Initial registration figures for the October graduation ceremonies show that 3,958 graduands have registered to agend. This number is expected to increase as registrations continue ahead of the final cutoff date, and the USU will continue to plan its graduation services and staffing accordingly.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Student Life Meeting

This meeting included an update on the University Infrastructure (UI) Campus Futures project. As introduced at the standing meeting on 21 August, UI is exploring how students, staff and the wider community engage with and experience the University of Sydney's campuses and spaces. Student Life's Sydney Student Voice team is supporting this work through a series of five student workshops.

Alongside this student consultation, the project is seeking feedback from the USU, SRC and SUPRA to understand priorities, opportunities, and perspectives on the current and future campus experience from a representative viewpoint. Given the USU's role in managing key buildings and services on campus, this is an important opportunity to ensure student needs are reflected in the University's long-term planning, and the USU will continue to engage with the project as it progresses.

SSAF Workshop Co-Design Meeting

The USU participated in a co-design meeting focused on how the University allocates SSAF funding to student organisations, including the metrics used to evaluate funded projects. As SSAF is a significant source of funding for USU programs and services, it is important that the USU contributes to shaping an allocation and evaluation framework that is transparent and reflects the full value that student organisations deliver.

SSAF Consultation Group Meeting

Janina and I met with Lydia Dutcher and Andrea Strachan from the University to discuss how the University plans to finance SSAF and infrastructure projects going forward. These discussions are relevant to the USU's longer-term financial planning, and I will continue to keep the Board informed as the University's approach develops.

Board Statement on Racism and Anti-Migrant Sentiment

The Board issued a statement condemning reported acts of racism and anti-migrant sentiment at the footbridge. The statement affirmed the USU's full support for international students and their rights on campus, and the importance of welcoming people from all backgrounds to our campus community. The USU remains commiged to ensuring that every

student feels safe, respected, and included on campus.

CLOSING

Again, I wish to give great thanks go to all the staff and volunteers make all of this happen. As we get into the crunch time of semester, it is heartening to know there are so many students who rely on and adore the services that the USU provides. Equally, it is heartening to be a part of the organisation that works every day to make the lives of students better.



Archie Wolifson
President