

BOARD REPORT

President

USU BOARD MEETING DATE: 26 July 2024

AGENDA ITEM: 13.4

REPORT PERIOD: July 2024

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SUMMARY

I'm humbled to have been elected as President of the USU for 2024-25, and to be delivering my first report for this year. When I joined the USU, I did it because I wanted to provide assistance in any way I could to an organisation that had provided me with so many positive experiences at university, and to learn how best to do that from my peers. In this role, I hope to provide stability and sustainability, to leave us in a better position in twelve months than the one we were left with.

It has been wonderful, and understandably demanding, to see the transition from the previous Board to the current one, and I have enjoyed witnessing new Directors dive fearlessly into their new roles. The period following and including induction was critical to increasing the knowledge of the Board and to set expectations.

The last 30 days have been extremely busy, as should be expected. I have met with or scheduled meetings with all important stakeholders of the USU and have worked to progress our relationship with each of them. In addition, I have looked to carry on much of the good work from my predecessor and intend to undertake significant governance and financial reform with the support of the Board to ensure that we are as healthy an organisation as possible.

As we move into the next month and semester, there is much to be excited about. From Battle of the Bands to weekly day trips to Someday Soon, from our 150th Anniversary Celebrations to 15 years of Verge, from the second half of our Revue season to tens of thousands of cheap meal offerings, I am keen for what the future holds.

The USU is an incredible organisation, not only because of its fantastic staff and enthusiastic members, but also because of its unifying commitment to the student experience. To the extent that this experience is bettered by a strong and synchronised Board, I look forward to setting that tone to ensure we have the right structures and strategy in place to achieve this goal.

ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

Financial health

As noted in the report of the Honorary Treasurer, the organisation continues to operate with a stable financial outlook. Whilst the MTD forecast for June noted a slightly increased deficit of \$51k, our losses in revenue were largely offset by COGS decreases and falling operating expenses. In addition, the Q2 reforecast found a modest increase in surplus. It is important that the Board recognise the benefits of having a surplus buffer to protect against unpredictable events such as changes to international student numbers, balanced against our commitment to ensure that student services remain on the table as much as possible during any budgeting process. The Finance Committee will meet on July 22nd to discuss these results.

In addition, I am pleased with the work being undertaken by our staff, particularly our SLT, to pursue new options for organisational health and sustainability by considering new revenue sources such as sponsorship opportunities and reconsidering old revenue sources through a contract review. I am looking forward to seeing the results of this work.

I would like to express my thanks to Michelle on the anniversary of one year of service to the USU by acknowledging the significant improvements to financial reporting that have been made by her and her team and recognise the effort this has taken.

Operational health

The work being done to streamline the operational health of the USU is critical. I am pleased by the Board's continued commitment to strategy refresh that will allow us to negotiate better and plan more thoroughly. In particular, our digital consultant and our campus experience strategist will provide exceptional insight to the Board, and I am looking forward to being able to take the insights from both projects and add them to our strategy document.

In my engagements with stakeholders from the university and student organisations, I have been pleased with the support for the work we are doing to activate our spaces on campus through our strategy refresh, and look forward to engaging with other organisations and the university where a codesign process can lead to a better student experience for our members.

Sustainability Working Party

On the topic of sustainability, I am extremely excited by the work Sargun has put into our newest working party, which will improve the USU's insight into sustainable practices, to be supported by an external advisor. I encourage all Board Directors to support Sargun in this role and to contribute if they have the capacity to.

GOVERNANCE

Committees

A number of important committee meetings have been held over the past week. The C&S committee is gearing up for AGM season, and the team is working around the clock to make the submission process as seamless as possible for all members. It is pleasing to see the expertise that we have in our team, led by Sam Trodden.

The governance committee, finance committee, and debates committee have also met in the past month. Well done to new directors for using these initial committee meetings to get up to speed with their roles and responsibilities.

Committee refresh

I am incredibly excited by the work being done by our Vice President, Ben Hines, to analyse the committee structures as they exist now in an attempt to both streamline them and to bring in greater expertise, particularly where we can engage with our talented alumni. Thanks must also go to Alyssa Wright for her work in pushing this initiative forward.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

I have met, or am scheduled to meet with, every major stakeholder for the USU. These conversations have been incredibly productive, and I am looking forward to growing our relationships in and out of campus to ensure that we are best placed in our conversations.

University

It was great to meet with the Vice Chancellor, Mark Scott, to discuss the USU's ongoing strategy refresh and how we can partner with the university to deliver services more effectively to students, whilst maintaining the integrity of our organisation. In a similar vein, it was great to meet briefly with the new Chancellor, David Thodey. I am pleased by the university's level of support for the USU's aims over the next year.

It was fantastic to participate in meetings with the Student Life team of the university, and I will be meeting with Susanna, Lydia, and Adam to conduct further discussions in early August. One of the key areas of focus for the USU should be engaging with the university to deliver our projects, and I am pleased by the opportunities that have been presented by Student Life to conduct further research into the campus experience. I look forward to updating the Board on these initiatives once I am able to discuss further with Lydia and her team.

My initial meeting with Greg and the UI team, as well as Joanne Wright, was productive. It is important that the USU remain vigilant over the coming year to ensure that negotiations leave us no worse off, and that is why I am happy to be participating in three separate discussion groups with UI to commence discussions regarding our affiliation agreement in conjunction with the Wentworth Building redevelopment.

SSAF discussions are also ongoing, and I will update the Board accordingly once these progress further.

Student organisations

I have met with SUSF CEO Ed Smith to discuss the ongoing relationship between our two organisations. I am excited by Ed's buy-in to our calls to improve the campus experience and I am looking forward to engaging with him over the next year where the USU and SUSF can mutually benefit from campus improvements.

It was also my pleasure to engage with Harrison Brennan from the SRC, and Vivian Bai and Frona Wan from SUPRA, both of whom are beginning their terms this month too. We are all committed to ensuring that students are well represented in all avenues of the university, and I will continue to engage with both of them to ensure that the USU holds up its end of the bargain.

Members

I am looking forward to engaging with our members in a variety of capacities over the next year. One of these avenues will be through the Clubs Conference, for which we anticipate a significant

turnout. I am also looking forward to meeting with USUAF to discuss their ongoing involvement with our organisation, and their important role as both a conduit and a source of ongoing advice and expertise. I will also be meeting with the faculty Presidents in August to discuss how we can better support their operations.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE TEAM

Engagement with staff

I cannot stress enough how much I appreciate the work of the staff. I will be making that clear shortly in an email to all staff in a monthly wrap-up following the first Board meeting, as well as providing my consultation hours to them. Of particular note, I would like to thank Michael for all the work he is doing for this organisation and appreciate the value he provides. Our weekly meetings have been productive, and we are working together to ensure the health of the USU. I have also met with all Heads of Department to understand their visions and will assist in facilitating where I can. I will continue to conduct monthly meetings with the HODs to ensure that these channels remain as open and transparent as possible.

Engagement with Board

We have made strides in the availability of information to the Board over the last month, particularly through the launch of a Board Portal to streamline our processes and make sure that the Board can access all the information they need to ensure the right decisions are being made.

It was great to work with the Board and key members of staff at our annual induction this month. Directors engaged well with the process, and I will continue to facilitate ongoing sessions to ensure members are able to make the decisions they need to.

As always, I am dedicated to a culture of collaboration and healthy discussion to ensure that we conduct our jobs with rigour. I encourage all Board members to seek out myself or a member of the executive if they ever have a matter they wish to discuss. In addition, once the Semester 2 timetables are finalised by the university, I will provide my consultation hours to all Board Directors. Remember, we are here to help!

INTERACTION AND EXPERIENCE

Impact reporting

Providing a quality student experience is synonymous with providing a positive impact for our membership and the broader university community. Our data shows the essentiality of the FoodHub and other free food initiatives, and for this I thank the Student Life team, Vice Chancellor's Office and others who have been able to support these initiatives with us to ensure maximum impact. In semester one alone USU has provided almost 77,000 opportunities for students to access free or cost-price food – more than triple this time last year. To put into perspective the targeted nature of the support that we provide, over 800 students visited FoodHub more than 10 times in semester one.

We have also seen a considerable increase in engagement in our clubs, events, and programs, with over 62,298 unique club memberships, with students joining on average 3 clubs each. This semester our USU membership has grown to just over 71% of the total student population and grown 10% in total. I am also pleased by the growth in USU Rewards members (44% increase) over the last semester, though it is an exciting area for continued growth and reform. Thank you to

Jane and her team for driving our excellent marketing strategy which is having a beneficial impact on these figures.

Student programs

In my six presentations this month to different student groups, I have noticed a keen appetite for what the USU can offer with regard to programs and events. The uptake of our student programs has been strong, with 510 students participating in Welcome To Sydney day trips in semester one, a record. Over 2000 students participated in the Welcome to Sydney Party which, along with our strategy of continuous and diverse engagement demonstrated by our average of 16 events a week over semester one, continues to drive strong support for the USU.

Welcome Fest is also right around the corner, and I am looking forward to seeing Directors at the festival. I encourage all our members to attend and take advantage of the atmosphere that is created by Welcome Fest. My thanks go out again to Sam Trodden and her team for their thorough work to get this project completed.

Thank you again to all members of the Board and staff for their work in making this first month particularly productive. As we move into the semester two, I am looking forward to seeing more and more students take advantage of the incredible experience we can provide. I hope to continue this pace throughout the year and will bring each and every one of you along the way.



Bryson Constable
President