

BOARD PAPER

PRESIDENT

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INTRODUCTION

Campus is back, and the pathetic fallacy has been in full force. We have received bountiful sunshine to mark what has been an extraordinary month for the USU. Semester 2 opened with one of the biggest Welcome Fests we have ever delivered, we're welcoming students back to a new gaming lounge in Wentworth, and our merchandise program has broken its own Semester 1 record. Alongside all of that, we held the first open member consultation on partnerships to date, made real strides with our Consent Check-In activation, and posted a strong financial result that keeps us tracking toward our budgeted full-year surplus. My sincere thanks go to every member of staff who played a role in making it happen.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT

Opening of the Wentworth Gaming Lounge

On 13 August the USU opened its new state of the art gaming lounge in Wentworth, and the response has been outstanding. Hundreds of students came through the opening event, and the atmosphere across the afternoon was excellent. Watching a space fill up on its first day gave a very clear early signal of just how much students will get out of it.

The space will hopefully give students who are not drawn to traditional events programs another way into the USU. Early engagement suggests it will become a genuine staple of campus life, and I am excited to watch the community around it develop over the remainder of the semester. Congratulations to everyone involved in bringing the project from concept to opening.

Welcome Fest

Approximately 40,000 visitors came through the festival across the two days, and we grew our membership by 4,838 students in that window alone. Our teams served more than 2,000 free meals and 2,200 coffees, and distributed 600 USU reusable coffee cups to students. Retail had an exceptional festival, selling 4,721 units against 3,659 in Semester 1. Welcome to Sydney drew 1,200 registrations and 950 attendees, and Party at Manning sold 703 tickets with 620 students through the door.

I'm particularly proud of our Consent Check-in initiative. It delivered more than 2,000 individual conversations with students over the course of the event, which is a remarkable reach for a program of that kind and a real credit to Charlott and the team.

A Welcome Fest of this scale operates as one of the most effective pieces of student engagement infrastructure that can be run at USYD, and the results this August reinforce the case for continuing to invest in it as a cornerstone of our calendar.

Welcome Fest Sustainability

I'd like to take the chance to callout the remarkable effort that is making Welcome Fest sustainable. The USU again partnered with Green My Plate to deliver the Welcome Fest food offering using reusable containers and cutlery. Across the two-day event, 2,368 reusable dishes and 698 reusable forks were washed and returned into circulation, achieving an overall retention rate of close to 94%.

A 94% retention rate at a festival of this size, with tens of thousands of people moving through, is an excellent result by any measure. It demonstrates the effectiveness of the closed-loop system and the willingness of our members to participate in it when the system is designed well. The initiative avoided approximately 40kg of single-use food packaging going to landfill, equivalent to around six 240L wheelie bins of waste.

Merchandise

Our half-priced hoodie initiative at the start of Semester 2 has been a standout success. Sales increased from 3,569 units in Semester 1 to 4,721 units in Semester 2. Repeating a discount initiative and growing volume by more than a thousand units is a strong outcome, and it reflects both the quality of the product and the effectiveness of how the team promoted it.

The University's contribution to this initiative has now been almost fully utilised. We plan to direct the remaining \$50,000 available for merchandise initiatives toward supporting visits to remote locations once the merchandise truck is operational, with delivery expected in mid-September. Students at satellite campuses and remote placements are too often on the periphery of what the USU offers, and a mobile presence lets us close some of that distance rather than asking them to travel to us.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Supporting the NTEU Industrial Action

The USU has taken a clear and public position in support of the NTEU's industrial action this month.

I maintained direct liaison with Peter Chen, President of the University of Sydney NTEU branch, throughout the period. Following proactive dialogue between us, the NTEU's stop work meeting on 10 August was held at a USU venue. The USU has resolved to close on-campus operations for the duration of the strike, subject to the continued provision of essential and critical services, and has publicly adopted a position supportive of the industrial action.

The relationship between students and the staff who teach them sits close to the centre of the USU's purpose. Staff working conditions shape student learning conditions, and an organisation that exists to serve the student experience has good reason to take an interest in the circumstances of the people delivering it. Making our venues available and standing publicly alongside the NTEU reflects that. I want to thank Peter for his openness in working with us, and our operations teams for the hard work and planning that has gone in to working around the disruption.

Vice-Chancellor's Breakfast

On 19 August I organised a meet and greet breakfast between the Vice-Chancellor and the student Board. This was a fantastic session and one of the highlights of my month.

Directors had the opportunity to discuss institutional priorities and areas of focus directly with the Vice-Chancellor, and to put the Board's own views on major campus events on the table in a setting that allowed for genuine back and forth rather than formal exchange. Access of this kind should not be taken for granted, and the willingness of our Directors to

engage substantively and confidently reflected extremely well on this Board. I would like to see engagement at this level become a regular feature of the year, and I intend to pursue that.

USU x Student Life

I met with Student Life on 21 August regarding the construction of a student partnerships framework with the University. This work continues to progress well and represents an important opportunity to clarify how the USU, the University and the other student organisations divide responsibility, reduce duplication and speed up decision making.

A further meeting addressed pain points in the SSAF process and how the system might be streamlined as the University seeks to update it. Anyone who has been through an SSAF cycle knows how much administrative weight sits in that process relative to the outcomes it produces. The University's willingness to revisit it is welcome, and the USU is well placed to bring practical, experience-based recommendations to that review.

Chancellor's Advisory Committee

I was fortunate enough to attend the Chancellor's Advisory Committee, which was incredibly valuable in fostering long term relationships with the university. As the sole student on the committee, I worked with the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor to discuss the importance of free speech on campus, and in particular how the robust protection of free speech is empowering for minority communities, including Jewish and Muslim students.

These are difficult conversations to have well, and I was encouraged by the seriousness and care with which they were approached at that table. A university that protects expression protects the ability of its smallest communities to be heard, and the student voice should be part of shaping how that principle is applied in practice.

Open Consultation on Partnerships

On 31 July I held an open meeting with members to discuss the USU's partners and our partnership policy. To my knowledge, this is the first consultation of its kind in the organisation's history.

A dozen staff and a wide variety of students from right across campus attended, asked questions and put forward suggestions. The discussion was constructive, and everything raised in that room has been taken back to the Board. Opening a policy area of this sensitivity to direct member input carries some risk, and our members more than justified the confidence placed in them.

The USU seeks to cultivate an environment where members feel comfortable sharing their perspectives on issues that affect them, and endeavours to treat those perspectives with care and respect. This consultation was a practical demonstration of that commitment, and I am encouraged by the engagement of students and directors in it.

Staff Engagement

The USU's Unplugged all-staff event at Manning was a highlight of the month. It was wonderful to see so many staff in one room, to hear the range of perspectives across the organisation, and to watch management publicly recognise the successes of their teams.

FINANCE

July's financial results were broadly in line with budget expectations. Expenditure increased during the month as a number of expenses deferred during the incorporation period were paid, as anticipated.

Revenue remained strong at \$1.4m, supported by the performance of the new Chancellor's Gift Shop, the half-price hoodie initiative launched late in the month, and continued strong HostCo activity. This is an encouraging result and directly supports our strategic objective of reducing reliance on SSAF funding through growth in diversified revenue streams. Every dollar we generate independently is a dollar of programming that does not depend on an allocation process outside our control, and the diversification of our revenue base remains one of the most consequential pieces of long-term work the USU is doing.

Year-to-date net income is \$1.1m, down from \$1.5m at the end of June, consistent with expectations and previous forecasts. With the anticipated increase in expenditure during Semester 2, we expect the year-end result to progressively move closer to the budgeted full-year surplus of \$516k.

CLOSING

August asked a great deal of this organisation and the organisation delivered. My thanks go to our staff, whose work underpins the results of this report, to our Directors for their engagement across a demanding month, and to our members, who continue to give us their time, their ideas and their trust. Semester 2 is off to an exciting start, and I am looking forward to what the months ahead bring.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Archie Wolifson", is located in the bottom right area of the page.

Archie Wolifson
President