Board Meeting
Thursday, 29 October 2026

President's Report: October 2026

Request: For Noting
Archie Wolifson, President

1. Recommendation

That the Board note the President's Report for October 2026.

2. Introduction

October has been a busy and productive month across the USU. Our events program continues to grow, with record crowds at the Manning Night Markets and strong demand for Scream Fest, while Creative Month gave hundreds of student creatives a platform to perform, exhibit and sell their work. Operationally, membership is tracking well towards our annual target and the joint merchandise project with the University and SUSF is moving towards a preferred model for 2027. We are welcoming a large cohort of new clubs for next year, and the new SXP drop-in office will make our staff more accessible to the students they support. Staff and Board members are also taking part in Gender-Based Violence awareness and response training, an important step in making sure everyone at the USU can respond appropriately and with care to disclosures. Finally, our cost-of-living work continues to meet strong demand, and planning for the 2027 Food Security Program is well underway.

3. President's Report

3.1. Operations

Further information has been requested on several SSAF applications for contestable event-based initiatives, as well as on several base funding projects involving proposed funding reallocations. The first SSAF Committee meeting was scheduled for 26 October, and a further update will be provided to the Board following consideration of the submissions.

A merchandise pop-up was delivered at the Conservatorium in conjunction with the Members' Lunch on 21 October. The activation was well supported, with almost 50 hoodies sold through the continuation of the half-price member promotion. Building on this success, a similar activation is planned for the Nepean Campus in November to expand member engagement and promote University of Sydney merchandise beyond the Camperdown campus.

3.2. Events

The 2026 Manning Night Markets delivered a strong outcome despite challenging weather conditions, attracting approximately 7,500 patrons across the two-night event. More than 2,000 complimentary meals were distributed to USU members, supporting student engagement and cost-of-living objectives. Attendance represents significant growth on the previous year's single-night format, which attracted approximately 4,000 attendees. A post-event review is underway to evaluate attendee feedback, operational performance and event outcomes, and its learnings will inform future delivery models and potential format enhancements for 2027.

Planning and ticket sales for Scream Fest 2026 continue to progress strongly, with the event on track to sell out at its increased capacity of 6,000 attendees, up from 4,500 in 2025. The event remains one of the USU's flagship student engagement initiatives and continues to demonstrate strong demand from the student community. Through a combination of SSAF funding and promoter contributions, approximately 1,800 complimentary meals will be provided to students at the event, supporting student affordability while enhancing the overall event experience.

Battle of the Bands returned to Manning Bar in September 2026, showcasing emerging student talent and giving student bands a platform to perform live, develop their skills and compete for a prize pool valued at up to $14,000, including cash prizes, professional recording sessions, music video production, promotional photography and future performance opportunities. Ten bands competed across two heats, with five progressing to the Grand Final on Wednesday, 23 September, and 772 attendees took part in choosing their favourite band. The Grand Final, attended by 340 people, featured a headline performance by The After Thoughts. The Array was crowned the 2026 winner, with Lily b placing second and No Safe Haven third.

3.3. Clubs

The Clubs team is currently onboarding 47 new clubs approved by the Clubs & Societies Committee, with several more pending approval. A highlight for 2027 is that clubs will be able to leverage the new NAB partnership to open club bank accounts more easily. Among many strong new additions, notable clubs include the University of Sydney AI Safety Society, YO-SYD, the United States Society and the Arm-wrestling Club.

The SXP will trial a drop-in office at the front of Holme Building to improve student access to the staff who oversee our programs, with a focus on the clubs' program. The space will be operational in the coming weeks, staffed by a mix of permanent and casual staff during peak periods. It will be open during semesters and is scheduled for full launch in Semester 1, 2027.

3.4. Student Experience

As part of the USU's workforce development and high-performance culture strategy, one-on-one leadership and management training has commenced for people leaders across the organisation. In addition, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) awareness and response training sessions were scheduled for 26 and 27 October. These sessions form part of the USU's commitment to ensuring all staff and Board members are equipped with the knowledge and confidence to identify, prevent and appropriately respond to disclosures relating to gender-based violence. Progress towards organisation-wide completion will continue to be monitored throughout the year.

Creative Month delivered strong in-person engagement, with USU-led events and activations attracting over 4,500 attendees and supporting approximately 275 students through creative and professional development opportunities. Overall attendance increased by 75% compared to 2025 (2,575 attendees). Highlights included 1,236 attendees at Pocket Art Market, 1,195 visitors across the Creative Awards exhibition and associated events, and 930 attendees across Battle of the Bands events. The festival also provided significant direct support to student creatives, with more than $16,000 in prize money awarded through the Creative Awards. In addition, Creative Month supported 12 student clubs, featured 46 student vendors at Pocket Art Market, showcased the work of 75 student creatives through the Creative Awards, and provided performance opportunities for 24 students through Battle of the Bands.

The USU's expanded Food Hub operating hours continue to be well utilised, with daily food allocations regularly exhausted throughout trading periods. Strong student demand reinforces both the importance of the initiative and the ongoing need for food security support across campus. Planning for the 2027 Food Security Program has continued in line with the Board-endorsed Food Security Strategy. The main proposed change is the retirement of the Bonus Breakfast program in favour of a breakfast offering within the Food Hub, with further expanded hours, and the remaining funding directed towards targeted campus-wide product subsidies that will benefit a far greater number of students.

The subsidised meal program delivered through the Food Caravan on Eastern Avenue continues to perform strongly, consistently providing more than 100 meals per day, and will conclude for the semester at the end of Week 12. Planning is also underway for the annual Exam Ready food support program, which will provide subsidised lunch, snack and dinner offerings throughout Stuvac and the examination period in partnership with Student Life.

4. Conclusion

I'd like to give my thanks again to staff, particularly amidst the tumult of the University staff strikes. I'm looking forward very much to seeing the hard work of so many in the organisation as well as students from across campus recognised in our annual Gala and Debates Dinners. From your president I wish you well and am excited for what is to come.



Archie Wolifson
USU President