

BOARD PAPER

PRESIDENT

USU Board meeting date: 23 July 2026

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Author: Archie Wolifson

Title: President

Phone/mobile: +61 413 696 299

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the new board for 2026! I want to start to by congratulating all the directors appointed to the board in their new roles. In particular wishing a warm welcome to Will, James, Nabilah, Serina, and Zayed. You have all put so much effort to get here, and can now reap the invaluable life lessons that being a board director at the USU provides. I've always liked a bit of advice passed down to this board by and think it is pertinent to share now, which is that "the university gives you your degree, but the USU gives you your education". I would also like to extend my appreciation to the second year and senate appointed directors on the board, who give our organisation the richness in background and character it requires. It is an honour to serve alongside you.

The position we are in is one of incredible luck and also of tantalizing opportunity. Now is a time of great difficulty in the lives of students, but it is also a time of hope, courage, and possibility. Such circumstances are we find ourselves in – where we can make genuine and concrete change – are exceptionally rare. I would like this year and this board to be characterised by a deep compassion to the needs of members, determination to strive to improve their circumstances, and most importantly to engagement in consistent, open, and honest communication. I am looking forward to the first of many reports, the first of many meetings, and the last of many incorporation documents to sign. Here's to a wonderful year.

GOVERNANCE

Committee Updates

Debates Committee

The Debates Committee received reports from the IV officers on the Australs debating competition, which concluded a few days prior. This provided the Committee with visibility over competition outcomes and ensured lessons learned are captured while still fresh. The Committee also planned development opportunities for early Semester 2, supporting the ongoing growth and skill development of USU debaters. Finally, it considered reforms to the trials and selections process, with a view to improving the fairness and transparency of how debaters are selected to represent the USU.

Finance Committee

The Finance, Risk, and Audit Committee (FRAC) noted an establishment of an Inventory and Stocktake Working Group, which was recommended by auditors. The committee noted the conclusion of the Finance Systems Blackout Period, as the Holme Annexe wind down finalises. An updated risk pack was discussed by the Committee, and has been tabled for the board. This financial period marks the end the blackout period necessitated by incorporation, as updated results now can be provided to both the Committee and the Board.

Governance Committee

The Governance Committee recommended to the board three papers this period. First, an Apologies and Leave of Absence Policy was approved, clarifying the distinction between the two categories. This resolves prior ambiguity and will help the Board manage attendance issues more smoothly going forward. Second, the Committee endorsed an Editorial and Artistic Freedom Policy alongside a Communication, Media and Brand Policy, affirming the USU's commitment to editorial independence and artistic freedom while ensuring consistency across the organisation's communications and branding. Finally, an AI Governance Policy was passed, providing a clear framework for the responsible use of AI within the USU and positioning the organisation to manage emerging risks and opportunities in this area.

AI Governance

Ongoing work is being undertaken to develop AI governance frameworks for the USU. This is an important step for a student facing organisation, as it ensures the responsible and consistent use of AI across services, communications and decision making processes. A clear framework helps protect student data and privacy, maintains trust in the organisation's outputs, and provides staff and volunteers with practical guidance on appropriate AI use. It also positions the USU to keep pace with the evolving regulatory and ethical landscape around AI, reducing risk while allowing the organisation to responsibly explore the benefits AI can offer to student services.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Student Executives x Student Life

Student Life convened a workshop to gather perspectives from student leaders across the USU, SRC and SUPRA, informing the development of a governance structure for the new student partnership framework. This work involves segmenting responsibilities across the different organisations to strengthen governance and accountability, reduce bureaucracy, and support a more efficient consultation and decision making pipeline.

USU x University Leadership

Ongoing liaison has been maintained with University senior management, including the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor. These relationships are important for ensuring the student voice is represented at the highest levels of University decision making, strengthening the USU's influence over matters affecting student life, and supporting a collaborative working relationship between the USU and University leadership on shared priorities.

Organising of Student Townhalls

The Board has had some consideration of organising student townhalls as a means of engaging directly with the student body. These would be structured around the portfolios of individual directors, allowing students to engage with specific areas of the USU's work such as governance, finance or member services, or focus on particular issues such as partnerships and investment where broader input may be valuable. Townhalls would be held publicly, promoting transparency around Board activity and providing students with a direct avenue to ask questions, raise concerns and contribute to discussions that affect them. This format also supports the USU's broader commitment to open communication, ensuring students are kept informed of Board priorities and have genuine opportunities to shape decision making processes. Beyond individual sessions, a regular cadence of townhalls could help normalise engagement between the Board and the wider student body, building trust over time and demonstrating that student feedback is genuinely considered in decision making. It would also provide the Board with a valuable feedback mechanism, helping directors better understand student priorities and concerns as they carry out their respective portfolios.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT

Looking Ahead to Welcome Fest

Welcome Fest remains one of the most exciting times of the year for both students and the USU, marking the beginning of the semester and setting the tone for student engagement across campus. This year the event welcomed more than 47,000 students, reflecting its continued scale and significance as one of the largest student engagement initiatives run by the USU. Notably, seven in ten students agreed that Welcome Fest helped them transition to university and build social connections, underscoring its role not just as a celebratory event but as a genuine support mechanism for new and returning students. This data reinforces the value of continued investment in Welcome Fest as a cornerstone of the USU's engagement calendar, and highlights its importance in fostering a sense of belonging within the University community from the outset of the academic year.

Cost of Living Initiatives

The USU's Impact Report detailed that over the past year the organisation provided 65,103 free or discounted meals and beverages to students, while the Food Hub supported more than 43,000 visits and distributed almost 78 tonnes of food to help address cost of living pressures faced by students. These figures reflect the scale of demand for support services and the USU's ongoing role in addressing food insecurity within the student population. Building on this work, Food Hub operating hours will be extended as part of staffing changes within the warehouse team, allowing greater accessibility for students seeking support. The satellite campus outreach program will also increase to nine visits across the semester, ensuring students studying away from the main campus are not overlooked. In addition, the successful Abercrombie \$6 After 6pm program will continue with full funding, maintaining an affordable dining option for students during evening hours. Together, these initiatives demonstrate the USU's sustained and expanding commitment to supporting students through a challenging cost of living environment.

Environmental Initiatives

The USU continues to progress its broader commitments to reconciliation, accessibility and sustainability, recognising these as interconnected priorities within its organisational strategy. This includes the approval of the Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan, which represents an important step in the USU's reconciliation journey and formalises its commitment to meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Alongside this, a range of environmental initiatives have been implemented that diverted thousands of single use items from landfill, contributing to a measurable reduction in the organisation's environmental footprint. These achievements reflect the USU's dedication to responsible and sustainable operations, and its recognition that organisational accountability extends beyond financial and governance performance to encompass social and environmental impact.

Gender Based Violence Initiatives

The USU launched its complaints and disclosure portal last month, providing students with a clearer, more accessible and confidential avenue to report concerns relating to gender based violence and other forms of misconduct. This represents a significant step in strengthening the support infrastructure available to students and improving the organisation's responsiveness to disclosures. In addition, the USU is actively considering its response to sexist content posted within the university's online sphere, recognising the growing importance of addressing harmful conduct in digital spaces. This includes ongoing consideration of how best to support Women and Gender Minorities, both in response to specific incidents and through broader preventative measures. These efforts reflect the USU's continued commitment to fostering a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for all students.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Archie Wolifson", with a stylized, flowing script.

Archie Wolifson
President