

In attendance

Chair – Robert Nutkins
Deputy Chair – Owain Gullam

President – Chukwudi Ezenyi (KC)
VP Education – Emi Dowse
VP Activities – Verity Lemm
VP Wellbeing and Diversity – Fawzy Ahmed

Chair of Accountability Board – Alex Jobling
Chair of Union Council – Robert Nutkins

UPSU Interim Chief Executive – Antony Blackshaw

Recording of the meeting, reports and the finance presentation can be found online at
<http://www.upsu.com/studentvoice/agm/>

Minutes

Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone in attendance and explained that as a charity UPSU has a legal requirement to present accounts to its members each year, the meeting also presents an opportunity to make changes to the Unions governing documents.

As well as general matters of housekeeping, the Chair then went on to run through the following points:

- The meeting is being recorded.
- Please use the Q&A function to ask questions, questions will be moderated for relevance and appropriateness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Please respect the opinions of other people and their right to speak, if you get involved in a debate then please make sure that you are questioning the issue and you do not get personal. ▪ Any inappropriate language or behaviour will not be tolerated and anyone being inappropriate or offensive will be removed. ▪ Any student registered on a University of Plymouth course is classed as a full member, unless they have chosen to opt out. All full members can speak and vote on any issue. Other people present may speak but cannot vote. <p>This meeting will be conducted in accordance to UPSU Memorandum & Articles and its by-laws as well as all other relevant policies.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Jackie Weaver to the meeting. Jackie Weaver gave a short introduction and then answered questions from the audience</p>
<p>Notice of Any Other Business</p>	<p>No notifications were received</p>
<p>Items to discuss</p>	<p style="background-color: #e1eef6; padding: 2px;">Proposed changes to the Memorandum and Articles of Association</p> <p>The Chair noted that seven changes to the Memorandum and Articles of Association had been proposed by the Board of Trustees and they invited the UPSU President, KC to explain more about each proposal</p> <p>KC gave an overview of each item and offered to answer any questions on the proposals.</p> <p>Q. Why is the term for trustees three years?</p> <p>KC asked Antony Blackshaw, Interim CEO to take the question. A. Antony Blackshaw: "External Trustee positions tend to attract longer terms, typically three or four years at a time, to provide continuity in in the Union, where the Officers change and the Student Trustees change on an annual basis. So it's just to provide that additional continuity for the Board."</p> <p>Q. Were there any specific events or reasons that prompted a proposed reduction in required student signatures for petitions?</p>

A. KC: "there was no specific reasoning to that, as I was also a seconder to that policy. But it just came off of the idea of you know, we are trying to get a more democratic Union, we have been saying we want more engagement from students, we want students to be more involved in decision making, so we thought that that number it was at before would be probably a difficult number to move motions if we always have to try to get 400 students to do that, So we thought that making more reasonable, to reduce it to something that much easier for students can do some more things and faster."

The Chair called for a vote on each proposal asking for participants to raise hand, the order of voting was for, against and abstentions.

Proposal 1.

Student Petitions

To reduce the number of students required to sign a petition to call a referendum from 400 to 1% of the student membership. This is line with a resolution passed at Union Council on the 9th Feb 2021.

Based on current HESA data the student population at University of Plymouth is 18,410 (1% would be 184 students)

For: 26

Against: 4

Abstentions: 1

Proposal 2.

Trustee Type and Student Trustees

To remove the specific numbers of each trustee type listed in the Articles of Association, to allow such decisions to be taken jointly by the Trustees and Union Council. To further note a formal proposal which will be taken to Union Council to increase the number of student trustees on the Board from two to four.

For: 25

Against: 1

Abstentions: 1

Proposal 3.

External Trustee Term Limit

To reduce the maximum term which External Trustees may serve on the Board by one year and to require ratification by Union Council of External Trustees at the end of each term of three years, should they wish to continue to serve on the Board (to the maximum of three terms in total).

For: 21
Against: 3
Abstentions: 5

Proposal 4.

Removal of Trustees by Union Council

To recognise that External Trustees and Student Trustees, ratified by Union Council must be able to be removed by that body, and not by a referendum of all students.

For: 20
Against: 4
Abstentions: 5

Proposal 5.

Removal of Student Trustees

To recognise that Student Trustees (as well as External Trustees) appointed by the Board must be able to be removed by that body.

For: 20
Against: 6
Abstentions: 2

Proposal 6.

Motion of No Confidence Petitions

To reduce the number of students required to sign a petition to trigger a motion of no confidence in an elected officer either through a referendum or a vote at Union Council from 800 to 1% of the student membership.

For: 25
Against: 3
Abstentions: 1

Proposal 7.

Students' Union Governance Committees

To remove the list of committees that are required from the Memorandum and Articles and move it to the Bye-Laws. This is to allow the Board of Trustees (with the agreement of Union Council) to establish such committees as are required to properly govern the Students' Union

For: 24

	<p>Against: 0 Abstentions: 4</p> <p>All proposed amendments to the Memorandum and Articles of Association passed.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone for voting and reminded members that any student can submit an amendment or policy idea through the Student Voice Department or via the relevant elected representative on Union Council.</p>
<p>Accounts and Finance Presentation</p>	<p>The Chair delegated the presentation of the Accounts and Finance report to Antony Blackshaw, UPSU interim Chief Executive Officer</p> <p>The Chair opened the floor for questions about the accounts</p> <p>Q. Is the sharp drop in incoming Funds during 2020 the reason the SU decided to take on large sponsorship deals this year at the expense of overall student experience?</p> <p>A. Antony Blackshaw: "Those two things are unconnected, I hope everyone has seen that we have engaged very directly with the concerns that students have raised, particularly through Council.</p> <p>In relation to the issues relating to sponsorship deals, and in particular I'm not going to name names, it would be inappropriate at this place, but a particular long term relationship with an accommodation provider, which we listened very closely to Council and we got ourselves extricated from that agreement.</p> <p>We continue to work with Council and listen to the feedback we get from Council to make sure that that what the student Union is doing, meets the demands of the students and that's not, we would not, that the idea is, we would not use that way of softening the shortfall, we will take entirely appropriate, and I would hope ethical, responses to help us through that difficulty, as I say, the reserves are comfortable are able to cope with that."</p> <p>Q. Why has the Union allowed such a large pension deficit to happen?</p> <p>A. Antony Blackshaw: "So the pension deficit has nothing to do with the student union, just to be absolutely clear, it is a deficit of the pension</p>

scheme, of which, we are simply one employer, the majority of student unions in the UK were employer, individual members of that Student Union Superannuation Scheme and, in common with almost all final salary pension schemes, under the rules set down by the bodies that regulate this, there is a requirement to identify what the funding ratio of those schemes are and if the scheme falls below a particular funding ratio, it is deemed to be in a deficit.

Our scheme is closed to entrants, nobody can join that scheme, but we are still dealing the historic fall out of the fact that there is a scheme which simply could not keep up with life expectancies increasing out of all expectations of when the scheme was set up, and so, people are living a lot longer, even though they're not working as long. And of course we when the scheme started, interest rates were very high, as high as 15%, which meant that pension funds made enormous amounts of money just by simply by having big pots of money.

We now live in a very low interest economy and which means that there are those schemes are flat and cannot keep up with inflation, that means the deficit has continued to increase on the schemes and we continue to pay those schemes off. It will end, but it's nothing to do with the Student Union, it's nothing to do with any decision that was taken internally at all, other than being part of the pension scheme which we are no longer in."

Q. As the situation with coronavirus improves will UPSU you consider how it could adjust its existing business aspects, for example, the SU shop, to make these business aspects COVID secure and enable them to operate in a potential future where we yo-yo in and out of restrictions?

A. Antony Blackshaw: "Absolutely, we're looking at all aspects, one of the things, there are many, many lessons have been learned as a result of COVID but certainly one of them is, you have to, we have to, think about future proofing and how we would deal with these things so that in future, even just beyond this, even beyond this pandemic, it's about it's about what can we do and how we do it to make sure that we can continue to operate. Whatever the operating scenario that we find ourselves in, whether it be after Easter or even when we come back in September so yes, absolutely."

Q. With this being second year of loss, what will change in the future, which will make the SU viable in the future. The previous year was not a pandemic influence year so this trend, cannot be entirely attributed to pandemic?

A. Antony Blackshaw: "Okay, so for clarity, when we talk about the loss that was made last year, we would be looking at the management accounts throughout the year. The actual operating...the Students Union made an operating surplus last year. The reason we show a deficit on the accounts is simply because of the huge increase that we've got hit with this £900,000 that we got hit with in terms of the pension.

So, in terms of the sustainable viability of the Student Union, last year was a very good year, extremely good, year for the Student Union financially. This year will be, there's no question, this year will we will not breaking even this year. We will have to use some of those reserves to cover that shortfall but there's no suggestion that that's a trend that will be affecting the future and, in fact, there is an expectation that once we are back to normal, certainly the economy is expecting a bounce back and I think we would expect that too.

There are lots of people who have simply not had the proper student social experience this year at all, and the first years that will be arriving will also have been in lockdown and been unable to socialize for a large part of the year, and I think we are expecting next year, to be substantial and looking at how we can build additional capacity and support to enable, particularly our activities and student led activities, to flourish to meet that demand next year. I think we are sustainable, I hope that the graphs that show the way that the Union has built those reserves over time, show that it has been a sustainable model now for some time and we would expect that to continue."

Q. Will loss of income negatively affect the provision of financial support for clubs and societies in the next academic year?

A. Antony Blackshaw: "No. The intention is that there's an absolute line ruled off and I think we're all very clear on this one in the business, there is a clarity in the board and throughout the Senior Management.

This year, this year is a one off year, we continue to work with university to identify whether the university will support us through this difficult stage but not surprisingly, I think they are taking the view that we have got reserves and therefore the Union can stand on its own two feet and I think you should as members of that Union, be very proud of the work that's been done in the past to make sure that position is sustainable and is strong.

But no, next year's budgets will be based on operations, that is, that stands on its own two feet and will not have, it will not carry over from this year at all."

Q. At what point did the SU sign up to the pension scheme 2 million pound liability seems large for such a small SU?

A. Antony Blackshaw: "Yes, so basically the problem here is that most Student Unions signed up to their pensions in the 1980s. And at that time lots of Student Unions, including ourselves were running substantial commercial operations with substantial staff, full time permanent staff, which meant that everybody was in the pension scheme, it was a very expensive pension scheme, we now have far fewer staff in those areas because of the way that the market has gone.

So it does look odd now, and this is true for, for I do interim for... I should explain I am a professional SU interim, I've worked in eleven Students' Unions in the last 10 years and, most of them have been in similar or worse situations. It's unfortunately a measure of how large we were the time we joined the scheme, rather than how large we are now and I completely agree it looks like a horrific amount of money to be to be facing, as I say, it does have to be read in the light of that works out to about £140,000 a year that we have to find to repay, and that is within the margins of our expectations of surplus from our commercial trading activities at the moment.

And whilst that continues to be the case and the block grants will be used exclusively for student activities and student representation and not to worry to have to meet the short fall on the pension, that will come from our commercial surplus and whether we can guarantee you that for the whole of the 15 years is challenging and we will continue to work on that, but yeah it's a huge amount of money and for those people who didn't live through that period it's a situation facing.... I mean if I tell you that the university's equivalent scheme is 17 billion in arrears currently and that is still open to people, people can still join that scheme and it's running a debt the US scheme, University Superannuation Scheme is running the deficit of 17 billion, at the minute."

There were no further questions for Antony Blackshaw, Interim CEO about the accounts

The Chair explained it was a requirement of the 1994 Education Act for the Students' Union affiliations to be presented to the membership on an

	<p>annual basis. The affiliation to NUS ceased on the 1st January 2020 and the remainder of the list were not affiliations but memberships and services that the SU subscribes to for sector expertise.</p>
<p>Reports</p>	<p>Board of Trustees Report</p>
	<p>Chukwudi Ezenyi (KC), UPSU President and Chair of the Board of Trustees gave an overview of the report.</p> <p>The Chair opened the questions.</p> <p>Q. Why are we paying NUS Services membership if we disaffiliated from NUS?</p> <p>A. Antony Blackshaw: "Thank you, yes, the question related to the affiliations, that NUS Services membership, which is a very low figure, it enables the students union, despite not being a member of NUS and not paying us affiliation fee, to benefit from the discounted prices that NUS negotiates for their members, it is a tiny amount compared to the discounts, which are which are available and it just provides the commercial team, the opportunity to benefit from those discounted prices."</p>
	<p>Union Council Report</p>
	<p>Robert Nutkins stepped down as Chair and Owain Gullam, Deputy Chair invited the Chair of Union Council to deliver the report on Councils activity</p> <p>Robert Nutkins, Union Council Chair gave an overview of the activities of the Union Council so far this year.</p> <p>There were no questions concerning the Union Council report</p> <p>The Chair reverted to Robert Nutkins</p>
	<p>Accountability Board Report</p>
<p>Alex Jobling Chair of the Accountability Board gave an overview of the report.</p>	

Q. Are the Union Council minutes published?

A. Yes,

<https://www.upsu.com/studentvoice/representatives/unioncouncil/>

Sabbatical Officers Reports

After each Sabbatical Officer presented their update, the floor was opened for questions. Sabbatical Officer updates can be found at <https://www.upsu.com/studentvoice/agm/>.

Questions for Chukwudi Ezenyi – UPSU President

Q. Having been in the role of President for coming up to 12 months now you've listed student engagement as a win, having less than 30 students in this very meeting, would you still call it a win?

A. Chukwudi Ezenyi: "First of all I didn't say student engagement was a win, I did say the opposite of that actually with regards to some particular student groups, and never said it was a win.

but you saying that we haven't has a win this year, of course, we I wouldn't say we did not expect this so far, because, like I said students are facing a lot of challenges now, we did not see it fit to put so much pressure, in as much as this is very important for them to be part of, but we did not see if it was too much pressure on them , combining the pressures they have already for them to, do you know, to force them, to sort of force them to say you have to be here in this meeting, with regards to engagement in this meeting, but no I didn't say that student engagement has been a win this year. I said it's something that needs to continually be worked on. I hope I clarified that for whoever asked the question."

Questions for Emi Dowse – VP Education

Q. The buddy scheme has cut off in mid November, why?

A. Emi Dowse: "Yeah, so that's not 100% true, it was true at the time and the main reason for that it was a very new and we didn't want to take on too many buddies and too many students because we wanted to make sure that those students who did sign up were completely supported, and that means that when we can take on more students, it will be more sustainable, so we don't just burn off straight away.

	<p>So it has opened up and closed since, and it will probably continue to for the end of the year, and we hope to make it so it can be continuous throughout the whole year for all students but up until we get it to a point where we can support all students who sign up effectively, we do have to cut it off because we don't want to have some people have half supported, if that makes sense.”</p> <p>Q. What advice would you give to your successor, about being an effective VP?</p> <p>A. Emi Dowse: I think the best advice I would give is to really listen to what students want. It sometimes may be different to what you think it is, and also that means sometimes going out to them in different ways and making sure that you're not just going to the same people who always ask. But, I would also say just try and work your best not to let the uni put their views on you, but make sure you're sharing the student views, because sometimes it can be quite difficult in that sense.</p> <p>Questions For Verity Lemm – VP Activities</p> <p>There were no questions for Verity</p> <p>Questions for Fawzy Ahmed – VP Wellbeing and Diversity</p> <p>There were no questions for Fawzy</p>
Any other Business	No items were raised at the start of the meeting.
Meeting ends	The Chair thanked everyone for attending