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# Redbus Outdoor working with Unions on outdoor media

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Neil Jenkins  
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We recently reached an agreement for a 5-year period for Redbus to install illuminated poster panels in our Students' Union. The new panels were installed in time for the start of the academic year and the flow of information between the company and the Students' Union has been excellent. We are very happy with the income this generates for the Students' Union and I would certainly say that the working relationship is off to a very good start.

Keith Brackstone  
General Manager,  
University of Bristol Students' Union

Redbus have come into our building and installed first class poster panels with no problems at all. They have been extremely easy to work and nothing has been too much trouble. The posters that are going in them are also very modern which was important to us to make sure they fitted in with the ethos in the Students Union.

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Entertainments Manager,  
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Agenda is the official journal of The Association for Managers in Students' Unions (AMSU). Every effort has been made to reproduce the articles as accurately as possible, but Agenda can not be held responsible for any errors made. All opinions expressed are those of the writers and not necessarily Agenda magazine or AMSU.

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## From the Co-ordinating Committee



**Author:** Mark Grayling  
AMSU Chair

The next eighteen months or so will see another phase of significant change for the UK Students' Union movement and AMSU will endeavour to support colleagues and help our Unions meet the challenges ahead. The landmark changes will arise from the introduction of variable fees for full-time undergraduate courses, from the start of the 2006/7 academic year and also from the changes to Charity Law likely to come in from 2007.

All the work we have done around change management, measuring quality and reviewing governance over the past period should assist managers as they advice elected officers and steer Unions through the period but it is imperative that the support continues.

The threats and opportunities will come along in, almost, equal measure with new monies into parent institutions up for grabs if we can demonstrate that we add value to the student experience yet there is an increasing need to seek new sources of funding beyond the block grant and mutual trading. It is no longer unheard of



for Unions to bring in bespoke funding for specific projects and activities yet many alternative sources remain untapped.

Changes to charity law will mean most Unions complying with some new regulation but there should also be new models of governance and legal status available.

And change is not limited to the UK and Ireland and the renewed links with colleagues in the North America and Australia will provide opportunity to learn from overseas experience. New links with Unions in Scandinavia may be worth exploring as they share many of the features of the UK movement but provide a different mix of services and activities for their members. We may be able to learn from the Student Co-operatives in Japan as well.

To that end, the AMSU events planned during this time pan out rather well. The experiment of an earlier conference in 2006 creates space for a different sort of summer event and also makes for a decent interval before the ACUI Region One event in November that year. There is also the possibility of an "alternative" or unofficial event and whereas this will not be an official AMSU gathering it might provide an alternative perspective if it happens and if the organisers pull a worthwhile programme together.

The official calendar includes the following;

**February 2006;** Senior Managers and Presidents seminar on the crucial relationship between the people who head up the elected officers and the staff in Unions.

**April 2006;** AMSU Conference with the various aspects of funding and finances in Unions as the theme.

**Summer 2006;** proposed HR Group event on the new Investors in People Standard aimed at both personnel and senior managers.

**November 2006;** ACUI Region One Conference in Connecticut with AMSU to source sponsorship and travel deals to enable a sizeable UK/Irish presence. Unlike 2004 and 2005 there will not be a Senior Managers/Presidents seminar programmed in the autumn of 2006!

Plans for the 2007 Conference and Seminars are still under consideration but the Co-ordinating Committee will consider possible partner organisations for the Conference.

Then in 2008, with Liverpool as the European City of Culture, there are plans to bring ACUI Region One over for a joint event with AMSU.

# NUS Extra



**Author: Joe Rukin**

Treasurer of National Union of Students and Chair of NUS Services Ltd

In this article, Joe provides some background on NUS Extra and brings readers up to date on the current situation and the trial.

## Background

NUS Extra is a new project from the National Union of Students for a student benefit card that students can purchase for £10.

NUS Extra is being developed to provide Students with a wider range of discounts and benefits than are currently available to them. It will also be much more 'functional' than many current identity cards, in that there are many more things that it will be able to do. For example, it will be possible to use NUS Extra to communicate directly with students and there is the potential to have a direct link between the card and Students' Union commercial activity.

There are significant financial implications associated with NUS Extra, since students will be able to purchase the card for £10, each Union will receive £4 per card issued. NUS itself will also receive a cut, which adds together to potentially make a significant amount of money to go directly back into providing non-commercial services to benefit students. NUS Extra is without doubt one of the most exciting new initiatives in the Student movement for many years.

## Context

Due to the importance of the project, NUS Extra will be my primary focus over the next twelve months. Since taking up office, I have read extensively on the project, something that is easy to do as there is a huge amount of information available on the subject! If you want to find out more you can visit [nussl.co.uk](http://nussl.co.uk) and of course [www.nusextra.co.uk](http://www.nusextra.co.uk).

The majority of this information has been prepared by the NUS Card Working group, made up of representatives from the NUS and NUS Services, who have been working on this project since autumn 2003. The group have been using research into the NUS Card and student life that was conducted by NOP as a basis for this work. During the course of this research, NOP spoke to over 1,000 students across the UK.

The context in which the work has been done can, I believe, be split into two main areas. These are card development and financial issues.

### North West Trial Unions

Cheadle & Marple Six Form College  
Hopwood Hall College Students' Council  
Lancaster University Students' Union  
Liverpool Hope Students' Union  
Liverpool University Guild of Students  
Manchester Metropolitan Students' Union  
Royal Northern College of Music Students' Union  
Salford University Students' Union  
Stockport College of FE & HE Students' Union  
The Liverpool Students' Union  
University of Bolton Students' Union  
Wirral Metropolitan Students' Union  
University of Central Lancashire Students' Union

## Card Development

The NUS Card is currently funded by the advertisers who are prepared to spend money on promoting their offers on the back of the card and in the booklet. This is okay, but it naturally limits the scope of the card;

- Only those discounters that are prepared to pay, go on the card, thus limiting the range of benefits available to students
- The card has remained relatively basic which means it cannot be used for the loyalty type activity which many retailers now consider to be the norm, particularly for monitoring the effectiveness of the activity
- The card does not provide the range of functions that many Students' Unions require and as a result some Unions do not currently use the NUS Card.

Hence, the working group have been very keen to develop a card which can meet the demands of the modern student and Students' Unions in the 21st Century.

Furthermore, the group were conscious of the pressure arising from the anticipated growth in competition in this area, both from commercial competitors and the government. The student market continues to prove attractive to other organisations and discount cards are an area in which members of the group see the potential for a great deal of competition.

However, in terms of meeting our ambition of providing our members with a modern identity card with a greater perceived value, there is clearly a significant financial implication. This cannot be ignored, especially in a particularly financially challenging period for the student movement.

## Financial Challenges

The financial challenges facing Students' Unions are well documented. Indeed, as recently as the last issue of Agenda Magazine (issue 82), John Berg wrote about the evidence of worrying financial trends for Students' Unions. Using the AMSU Survey as a basis, John concluded that there was a large fall in net income from trading last year, which follows an existing downward trend over the last five years of about 1% per annum in real terms.

At the same time, NUS is facing a number of financial difficulties which we are tackling

head-on with new emphasis on cost control and expenditure reduction, measures which I, as Treasurer will be overseeing. In addition to implementing these initiatives, we are seeking new sources of income for both the NUS and Students' Unions. The system of financing both NUS and Students' Unions as it is, is quite simply untenable in the long term, and if we fail to act today, we will be punished tomorrow.

In 2004/05 NUS distributed just under three million cards. If we sold only half that number in 2006/07 then we would turnover £15 million. If member Unions were paid £4 per card, that would be a total of £6 million worth of new revenue going direct to on-campus student services.

The real beauty of this, of course is that from a Union perspective, issuing cards is something that most already do – therefore, in many cases the resource implication of introducing this new product would be relatively limited. Furthermore,

#### Research Summary

NOP Consumer conducted detailed research into the NUS Card on behalf of the NUS Card Working party, involving over 1,000 students. The findings included the following:

- The current NUS Card has a perceived value which ranges from £50 for a student in Further Education through to £200 for a first year student in Higher Education
- In its current format, 72% of student surveyed would pay an average of £6.82
- An increased number of students would be prepared to pay more for the card if enhanced benefits were associated with it
- These improvements were, overwhelmingly, the inclusion of additional discounts on the card
- If these were added, just under 90% of students were prepared to pay for the card
- Once those benefits were added, students would be prepared to pay more for the card, on average £10.41

the scale of the financial impact would be unprecedented in recent times.

This is clearly an exciting opportunity to re-engineer the finances of the National Union and provide a new income stream to Students' Unions. The long term financial implications are even more attractive. The NUS currently has over 700 constituent members, with over 5 million students.

'Extra' has a compelling rationale. Through this approach we can provide more for students and more for our members. I believe that this is an opportunity to effect significant and lasting change for the better.

#### The Current Situation

As I write this article NUS and NUS Services are working with a small group of Students' Unions to test the 'NUS Extra' concept. As you read this article, Students' Unions across the North West of England are embarking on the pilot project.

The trial is, in effect the final piece of research into NUS Extra. It is an opportunity to test the research in a live environment and will provide us with the clearest indication possible on the future viability of the product.

To run the trial, Unions in the North West have been invited to sell 'Extra' cards to students during the freshers period and indeed throughout the 2005/06 academic year.

While the trial will be very valuable, it is also quite a complex process. At the same time as the trial is underway, the standard NUS Card distribution will be taking place throughout the rest of the UK. For financial reasons and time constraints, it has not been possible to build all of the issuing systems that would be available as part of a national roll out. Furthermore, not all of the additional benefits will be available on the card during the trial period. Some of the potential benefit providers, such as Young Persons Railcard, are watching the trial with equal interest, prior to committing to involvement with NUS Extra!

Therefore, the trial will be a version of what 'Extra' can be, a snapshot of a new

product. It is clear that a national NUS Extra card would have far greater benefit to it. This will be factored into an evaluation process that will include consideration of;

- Card sales v student population
- Customer satisfaction
- Systems performance
- Students' Union feedback

This evaluation will be key in determining if and how NUS Extra will be rolled out to Students' Unions nationally and is, therefore, hugely important. I am very grateful to those Unions that have chosen to get involved at an early stage.

At a recent meeting of the trial group I caught up with Ross Waters and Kathy Wylde of Wirral Metropolitan Students' Union who told me; "We are really delighted to be part of the trial. As an FE union we have very limited funding and this is a great opportunity to provide our students with a new service and secure some new income. It also has the potential to be a massive benefit to part-time and mature students – sectors overlooked by the current card. Best of all, we get to test it out first, which means it is relatively low risk for us." In reality, the NUS Extra card has the potential to completely change the financial landscape in Further Education, where unions in the main receive paltry levels of funding from their college authorities, if indeed they receive any funding at all.

#### Dwayne Branch, Lancaster University Students' Union President;

"Last year at Lancaster we introduced the Purple Card. We sold the card for £10 to our students and gave them a range of services. In particular, it enabled our student to access a range of local discounts and was very well received, with nearly 7,000 being sold, representing the vast majority of our students.

"We think that strong national discounts provided by NUS can add to existing discounts and services we offer. Students' Unions should be looking to take advantage of that opportunity."

## The Future

I have touched on the financial implications, which are hugely important, but the potential scope of NUS Extra is greater than purely financial benefits.

We all know that the student market has changed irrevocably. We know that the market has grown significantly throughout the 1990's and that today, in Higher Education there are over two million students. Furthermore, we know from studies such as those prepared by MORI, that on average they spend around £7,000 per annum and that according to Barclays, students will graduate with approximately £12,000 of debt this year.

However, it is my view that these 'averages' hide some significant diversity – perhaps more diversity than ever before, the natural consequence of the changes to student funding over the last decade. One quarter of students in higher education now live at home. Fifteen percent of students are from minority ethnic groups and eleven percent are overseas students. Over 50% of all students are now classified as mature. More students are working and around 40% of students spend around 9 hours per day traveling to and from University, in lectures, studying and working part time – a busy bunch!

Perhaps nowhere is this diversity more clearly apparent than in the current financial situation. Last year the Thes conducted a survey that revealed that some students were living on £9.50 per week after rent, but that at the other end of the scale 11% of students have over £100 after rent.

Therefore, we have a student population with widely different needs and as a result an imperative to establish new ways of connecting with these students and providing them with something which is of a clear benefit. I believe that NUS Extra is the way in which we, as the student movement can collectively do this.

If we can work collectively to use 'Extra' to understand our students much better and use it as a way to deliver to them new services then we have a hugely powerful tool. On the one hand, there is an opportunity to build commercial activity by creating a loyalty card – driving activity into the Union. Equally exciting though, is the opportunity to drive and develop non-commercial activity through the card. If students are busy and not necessarily living close to their Union, we must make some of the services traditionally delivered on campus more 'mobile'.

I am told that in the future there are many opportunities to develop the technology on the card. Indeed, it may be that a card is not the most appropriate platform to use – a mobile phone or hand held computer may be more appropriate. We could

embed a Radio Frequency Identity (RFID) Chip into the card, which would open up a whole new avenue of opportunities. This may seem a long way in the future, but the speed at which we see developments in technology these days, means we cannot ignore any possibility.

It is my belief though that the most important element are the people involved. Therefore, my main focus and that of the working group is on working collectively to develop the right solutions for Students' Unions and their students.

The trial will be central to understanding how this initiative can be of maximum benefit to those stakeholders and I will ensure that everyone is fully briefed as to the outcome.

### Issuing NUS Extra

Issuing NUS Extra will be a major operation. The requirement to collect payment introduces a challenge which does not currently exist. In designing the process, the working party have been conscious of the diverse requirements of Students' Unions. Therefore, there will be three options available to Unions:

#### 1) Basic Issuing

Similar to the current issuing process for NUS Cards, with the added requirement of collecting cash. Students' Unions would;

- Order cards from NUS Services
- Sell the card to students and collect payment
- Record the details of the sale into a database system (provided)
- Pay NUS for the cards sold and return those that were not sold

The advantage of this approach is that it is simple and easy to manage. The drawback is that the card will not be particularly sophisticated (you will still need to laminate a photo on for example).

#### 2) On-Campus Online

For this method, Students' Unions would;

- Collect students details into a database system (provided)
- Collect payment through an online payment system (provided)
- The student would be issued with a receipt
- A card would be printed centrally and then dispatched back to the Students' Union for collection
- The student would visit the Union to collect their card
- The Students' Union would receive their commission payment on a monthly basis
- The primary advantage of this approach is that the student receives a more sophisticated card and there is no requirement to collect and manage cash.

#### 3) Online

For those Students' Unions that wish to use this option, students will be able to purchase cards remotely and even before they arrive at University. This would have the advantage of reducing queuing time at the beginning of term.

## Connecting with members



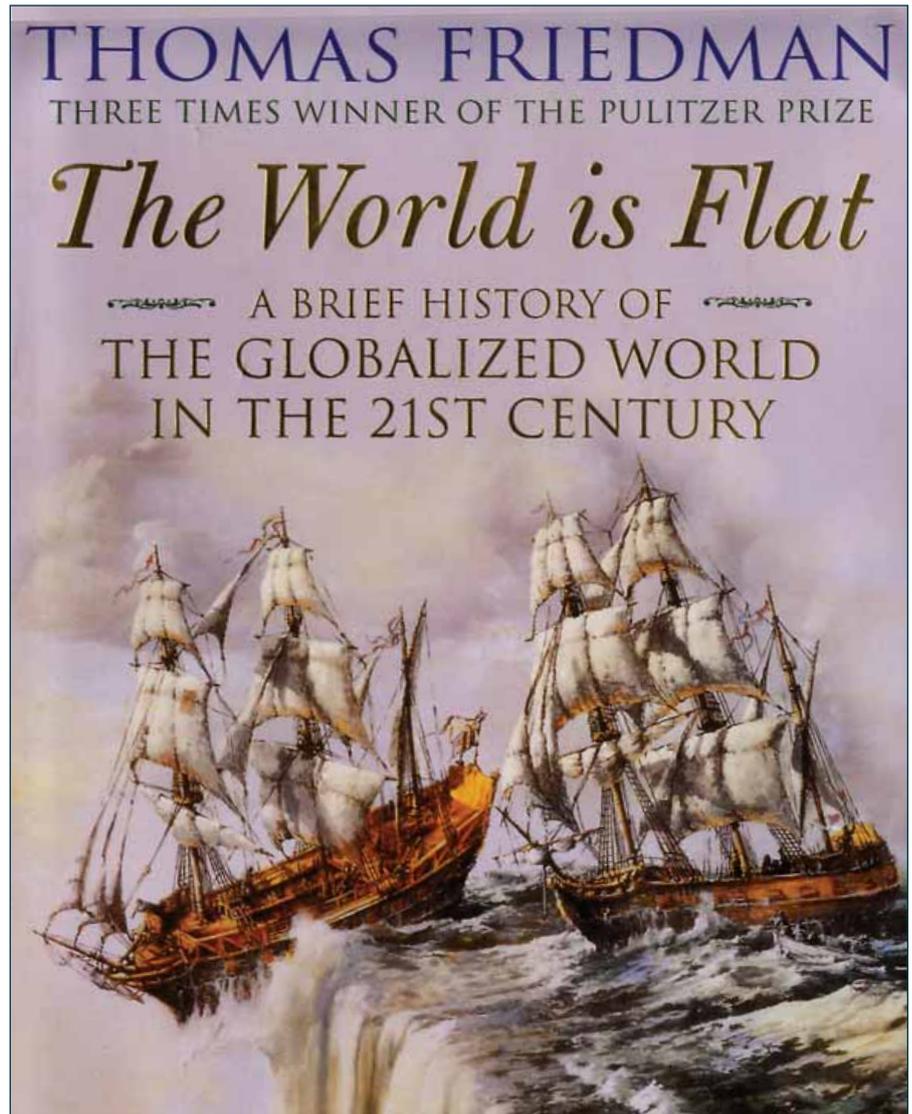
**Author:** John Windle

Has a year really passed since I last wrote something arising from our annual visit to the Hay Festival?

This year's event extremely busy but still managed to meet up with the AMSU delegation. Thought members would be interested once again in translating some of the themes into the Union working environment.

Highlight this year for both myself and Mr King was definitely Thomas Friedman – economist, author and regular contributor to the New Yorker. Friedman has published a number of books on globalisation and the effects of the convergence in technology. It is this latter theme which dominates his latest book – *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalised World in the 21st Century*. He talks about the major role in the supply chain of countries such as China and India and the future consequences of this. He suggests that the world is becoming flat because of technological development. The lessons to reflect on arising from his lecture were:

The increasing importance of learning both for individuals and organisations. If we stop learning as individuals or as organisations we will be less relevant and will quickly be left behind. Learning is the new economy. The emerging economies, companies and organisations know this



and are placing increasing emphasis and resources into this reality.

In our interactions the vertical command and control model is redundant. We should now be working horizontally – connecting, collaborating and facilitating (ring any bells on the governance front?)

Taking Friedman's arguments we should probably reflect on our connections with members and ask if these could be

'flattened' for their benefit? This is a theme discussed further later. His arguments can also make us reflect on how we try to satisfy our members' needs and aspirations. We sometimes too quickly see a need and assess if we can meet it – if not we don't provide it. To bring real benefits to members we should perhaps ask how can this need be met and by whom? The needs and aspirations must be paramount. We must use the collaborate/

connect/facilitate horizontal model to seek out ways we can bring real benefits to members rather than sit back and feel if we can't do it we can't provide it.

Learning is something most of us profess we do as individuals and as organisations – but do we and what kinds of learning are we attempting? Friedman suggests that all learning, particularly skills and knowledge advancement is essential. Learning however also encompasses and links into his other themes. We should continue learning about members and the services/activities we offer. We should strive to gain as much information about these as possible.

There was also a short theme on uncertainty – we live in an uncertain world and the people and organisations who will be successful will try to eliminate this uncertainty by gaining information – as much information as possible. This links into the Learning strand.

Do we do all we can as a Union to reduce uncertainty by trying to gain information on critical issues? Are sufficient resources devoted to this end?

Next one up – Vernon Bogdanor, the Oxford Professor of Government. Themes emerged based on the French and Dutch votes on the Constitution with lots of relevance to the Union situation, and

particularly helpful personally in reflecting on some of the Governance issues I am currently assisting with.

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**“ My tip is to remember the old acronym KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid.”**

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Major themes emerging were:

The old way of Leaders leading and People following died some time ago, but there is now resentment against people who try to re-introduce it, unless they are extremely charismatic! Leaders have to persuade people to follow and have to know their capacity to persuade and influence as well as people's capacity to be persuaded and influenced over particular issues.

Regarding governance, people want to know how they can persuade and influence an organisation, not how the organisation controls itself. There is a need to directly influence rather than this being done through a third party.

People want outputs not procedures (heard that somewhere before!)

Popular Forces for influence demand a particular acceptable Form of governance. Systems must try to resolve the tension between the congruence of FORCES and FORMS.

I thought these would be helpful as a number of Unions are looking at their governance forms. My tip is to remember the old acronym KISS – Keep It Simple, Stupid. Start from a member's perspective and what is right for them and then proceed accordingly.

Lots to think about arising from those two sessions and we managed to attend ten sessions this year. It really is worth going to an event like Hay and trying to make those connections into your own particular situation. I particularly enjoyed this year as I came away from Hay the proud owner of a book that was signed ' To Sue and John from Anna Politkovskaya'.

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### Reading List

Thomas Friedman: The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Globalised World in the 21st. Century (Allen Lane)

Thomas Friedman: Longitudes and Attitudes; Exploring the World Before and after September 11 (Penguin)

## Outsourcing accounting: the Reading experience



**Author: Ben Elger**  
General Manager at  
Reading University Students' Union

Outsourcing has long been a tool of HEIs and SUs and it is possible that with the financial and other challenges facing UK SUs over the next few years, more SUs will look to outsource more operations and activities. Outsourcing catering is quite common but, perhaps more surprisingly, personnel and advice services have also been outsourced by SUs in recent years. In this article, Ben Elger, General Manager at Reading University Students' Union, writes about their experience of outsourcing the accounts function working with Charity Business.

A little before Christmas 2003 the RUSU management team sat down to consider options for a senior finance role within the organisation. The background to the discussion was the notorious expense and difficulty of recruiting high calibre accounting personnel in the Thames Valley, and in Reading especially; with umpteen major IT Companies on the doorstep it is always going to be very hard to recruit in

this market, despite the myriad 'interesting challenges' that RUSU can offer.

Notwithstanding this, we were very keen to bring some heavyweight financial planning and analysis into our team. RUSU has expanded quite rapidly in recent years, with the support of the University. All parties have finally been able to put behind us the 'crash' of the early nineties and the issues of trust and suspicion that emanated from it. Thus we felt that further opportunities would be available to us if we improved the depth and quality of the information we could provide. We also knew that the uncertain commercial climate facing Students' Unions made meaningful and timely information even more essential than ever.

As we worked through our options, our discussion focused increasingly on the idea of quality versus quantity. We felt at this stage that we had the resources in-house to deal with much of the day-to-day financial management but that this needed to be supplemented by higher level guidance, especially at critical points such as in the run up to our Block Grant meeting or when we were putting bids and business plans together. Essentially we wanted access to resource at a level we could not ordinarily afford. Whilst in principle we would have been happy to consider collaboration with another Union on a joint appointment, this did not fit with our commitment to maintain the roles for our existing staff and neither this nor a part-time appointment would have got around the geographical issue. At this point we began to consider whether outsourcing would potentially give us the highest level of flexibility.

In some ways this option was not radically

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**. . . we felt that further opportunities would be available to us if we improved the depth and quality of the information we could provide. We also knew that the uncertain commercial climate facing Students' Unions made meaningful and timely information even more essential than ever.**

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outside of our basic strategy. The Union has, for several years, run with only a small complement of permanent staff to maximise flexibility and, in one area, Facilities, full outsourcing had proved efficient and successful for us. Nevertheless, there were naturally concerns about any perceived loss of control over such a critical area as finance and we thought it would be very important for any potential partner to fully understand this and have experience of working in this particular way with similar organisations. This, along with the focus on analysis and the wish to avoid duplication of function, steered us to widen the search from the usual audit and accountancy firms.

At this point, via an insert in an ACEVO



mailing pointed out by Ian King at NUSL, we became aware of the company, Charity Business. The Company provides a range of services to the charitable sector but, in particular, we were interested because as part of their financial portfolio they offer a Virtual Finance Manager. The straightforward principle here is that Charities can time-share finance managers allowing access to high calibre accountants and analysts for several days a month. The precise amount of time and the model for charging are arranged on a bespoke basis. After a period of investigation and negotiation we decided to trial the virtual finance manager service, initially on a rolling basis but with a view to using Charity Business for at least a year.

It will probably not be a surprise to anyone who has been involved in any outsource project that this initial period revealed demonstrable benefits and also important difficulties. The biggest plus point was,

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**. . . there were, naturally, concerns about any perceived loss of control over such a critical area as finance, and we thought it would be very important for any potential partner to fully understand this and have experience of working in this particular way with similar organisations.**

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without doubt, the quality of financial expertise made available to us. Within a very short period we were able to get advice, for instance, from a commercial accounting perspective from a former senior projects manager at Sky and from a charitable perspective from former finance directors at Marie Curie and the Consumer Association. This brought a very useful outside perspective to our thinking and planning and challenged some of our assumptions as a senior management team in a healthy way. We were also able to re-organise our financial reporting to allow us to begin to tailor much better the information being provided to different people within the Union, from trustees to outlet managers.

Most of the main drawbacks –and again this may be familiar in other outsourcing scenarios- centred around the ‘join’ of what we were doing in-house and what was being outsourced. The in-house work aimed, for example, to take the monthly accounts to trial balance level before handing over to Charity Business in Swindon. This, however, resulted in a number of significant problems. Firstly, there were some problems with the compatibility of software and systems that meant, although a review of processes by Charity Business had identified the opportunity to significantly reduce inputting time, this was difficult to achieve in the initial period. More crucially perhaps, despite the goodwill of all parties, there was a lot of work that appeared on the cusp between the two methods. We were able to work through the issues that this caused, but a clear consequence of this was that it took up a considerable amount of senior management time, particularly for Nicole, our HR and Support Services



We felt, at this stage, that we had the resources in-house to deal with much of the day-to-day financial management but that this needed to be supplemented by higher level guidance, especially at critical points such as in the run up to our Block Grant meeting or when we were putting bids and business plans together. Essentially, we wanted access to resource at a level we could not ordinarily afford.

Manager who was overseeing the process from our end. This was a problem for us because we had, perhaps naively, only really anticipated Nicole managing the staff left within the in-house finance department, rather than getting directly involved in day-to-day discussions on finance.

In summary, this first stage of outsourcing finance certainly proved for us that this was potentially a sensible and highly advantageous route to continue down. However, it would be misleading to suggest that it did not involve quite a lot of short-term pain as we worked through issues, agreed new systems and shared knowledge. Even though we felt that we were cognisant from the start that there would be a need to manage the process closely, looking back now we would admit that we underestimated the extent of this

work. In some ways it was a real advantage, at this point, that people at all levels within the organisation had been so frustrated with our financial information previously! This meant that the majority of stakeholders did not have such a feeling of going backwards before we could go forwards and gave those of us who were more involved the impetus to persevere.

In autumn 2004 we undertook a thorough review of our working with Charity Business. This was a really key time for us in terms of potential efficiency gains. Some staff members had or were shortly to leave and decisions were pending on replacing hardware and renewing software licences within the finance area. We had gained an understanding of and confidence in Charity Business and we had identified as the key drawback, in the otherwise successful switch to the Virtual

Finance Manager, the rather artificial trial-balance cut-off. We knew that we would not move to having no member of staff designated internally to finance. Apart from the need to have someone on-site to deal with cash and other transactions with clubs and other internal customers, our experience so far had demonstrated the need to have a strong link person and progress chaser as the main interface to the outsource company. However, fortunately, in Kathryn, our former retail manager who had moved into the finance section after maternity leave, we had

someone capable of fulfilling that function and we decided that everything else should be done in Swindon, (Our payroll has always and continues to be handled by our HR Administrator). We therefore agreed, in December 2004, that Charity Business would take on processing work for the Union as a whole from February 2005, and by way of a pilot, the Company through which our nursery operates, RUSU Services Limited, from January.

It is probably worth specifically noting here that it was only at this point that straightforward financial savings became paramount in the decision making process, with this being one of the main criteria for further outsourcing. The original decision to contract a virtual finance manager was based on the principles of added value as opposed to cost cutting.

Once again, there was a very difficult period immediately after outsourcing. Naturally, we had been keen to have as little disruption as possible to the production of financial information, and Charity Business facilitated this by undertaking to complete the take-on process in only a matter of weeks. Even though they, and Susan our VFM in particular, had a level of knowledge of the organisation, they were still on quite a steep learning curve at this point. Obviously, one of the issues for Charity Business is that Students' Unions are really quite unusual charitable bodies, presenting some unique challenges. In particular, the wide variety of activity calls for a greater diversity of processes than would be the case with most clients. Whereas, when we first contacted Charity Business, our perception was that they would find a charity undertaking so much trading activity problematic, in fact it has been more the range of work required to

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**In summary this first stage of outsourcing finance certainly proved for us that this was potentially a sensible and highly advantageous route to continue down. However, it would be misleading to suggest that it did not involve quite a lot of short-term pain as we worked through issues, agreed new systems and shared knowledge. Even though we felt that we were cognisant from the start that there would be a need to manage the process closely, looking back now we would admit that we underestimated the extent of this work.**

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support everything from large trading outlets to a nursery to clubs and societies that has taken a bit of time to get to grips with.

After four months of the full outsource there are, of course, still some teething

troubles. Undoubtedly, however, we feel that we are now reaching a much more sensible and sustainable division of labour. Our management accounts have become more timely and accessible and our ability to deal with tax and statutory issues has increased exponentially. We have just put together a Block Grant Bid with far more confidence in our projections than ever before and gone through a budgeting process in which our finance function was of real value to managers. Although, to an extent, one of the great advantages is the role the VFM can play as a challenging outsider, there is also a real sense of partnership and shared goals. Finally, we are able to project some significant savings in the finance administration area, particularly by reducing capital outlay.

In discussing finance outsourcing with colleagues, many of the questions return to the feeling of loss of control. Our experience in general really has been that this is more a perception than a reality and, if anything, because we have had to be a bit more structured in our approach we probably have better control systems. What matters, at the end of the day, is the providing of the appropriate information and advice at the relevant time and, if these are not forthcoming, control is illusory, wherever the problem originates! We have also enjoyed support and positive initial feedback on the project from key players within the University and internal audit, so confidence has been maintained in this regard. Of course, outsourcing will not be a solution for everybody, but as a response to the specific conditions we were faced with at RUSU, we would deem it to be a success so far . . .

More information about Charity Business is available from the NUS Services website.

# The death of AMSU Conference



**Author: Paul Clayton**

Deputy General Manager  
University of Plymouth Students' Union

Over the 17 years and 80+ editions of Agenda magazine one of the most commonly recurring subjects for articles has been the role of the AMSU Conference. It seems that the aim of the event, who should attend, the venues and facilities and the mix of types of session and speakers, has always been a topic that has divided opinions. Indeed, Any Other Cheese & Biscuits tried to poke gentle fun at this debate, in the last issue, highlighting that there are so many perspectives and opinions to take account of.

In his regular column the Chair of AMSU, Mark Grayling, outlines the thinking behind the plans for the AMSU Conference over the next few years, demonstrating a desire to try new ideas and be more outward looking. This approach was endorsed by a 95% majority of SUs in an online ballot, and at the AMSU AGM in July. In this article, Paul Clayton, Deputy General Manager at the University of Plymouth Students' Union, reflects on his own experiences of the value of the AMSU Conference in recent years and is openly critical of the decision of AMSU to alter the conference format in 2006 and use

a non-SU venue for the first time, fearing that it may lead to a permanent end to the traditional style AMSU Conference.

AMSU CONFERENCE 1998 – 2005, AMSU Conference was laid to rest peacefully this May after a long battle against change. We will sorely miss the lively banter, the interesting cities and the idea sharing with other unions. We hope that Conference rests peacefully and take some small comfort from the fact that she died happily in the beautiful city of Cork. Well wishers who can face the emotional strain are asked to gather in April in Liverpool for a small reflection on what once was.

Obviously, this is a dramatisation of Dickensian magnitude and the dates may be wrong, but I feel we need to air the thoughts of the many at Cork on what seems to have been a snap decision, made with poorly discussed debate and even less well executed democracy.

Not only am I relatively new to the 'Movement' but I am also soon to leave it (I am off to Brisbane) so I feel in a uniquely secure position to 'tell it like I see it', as I often like to do. And what I have seen is a conference of Union managers who have finished the slog that is the spring term, summer ball behind them, and another year of working with Students, Officers and the University gone and time to relax, learn and share, in the company of people that they respect, in a setting that is both conducive to such activity, and that offers something new to ponder. What I did not see or hear was one single person that a) was looking forward to the same event next year at the Adelphi, indeed many were simply not going, and b) who will take responsibility for suggesting and championing the move to a joint NUS Services/AMSU conference 2006.

So, why is it going to be so bad? Is this just fear of change? I think not. What I saw that enticed me into the occasional madness that is Students' Unions is a collective that is the personification of synergy. I came from a

more commercial world where cut and thrust are literal terms and support was something you rarely found in your own company, and certainly not the sector in which you worked!!! What I found here was a network of talented and experienced managers and leaders who were completely open with me and were happy to share their knowledge and learning, to ensure that I avoided many of the pitfalls that they have come across over the years. Additional to that was the willingness of such individuals (and you know who you are) to have me visit their 'homes' and see what they did well and

**I came from a more commercial world where cut and thrust are literal terms and support was something you rarely found in your own company.**

badly, so that I could steal what I wanted and avoid what had failed. Taking the next step was to extend that value to Conference, and for me that meant Kent, Cardiff and Cork.... three different venues and three great experiences that all had key factors that I took away to work on back in rainy Plymouth. Additionally, I met more people every year, sometimes it was as little as putting a name to the email address that was such a regular contributor to the mail-base debates, but, in other instances, people who I know I will keep in touch with and respect completely and would phone if I was in a jam.

O.K. I hear the sceptics say, why can this not continue? Simply put, two factors.

1) the Adelphi cannot teach me anything outside of how to make poor food and how to overprice beer. As such, the ability to visit

another union and take from it all that is good and bad, gaining valuable KPI's and yardsticks that we all need for judging our own performance, is gone and replaced by the soulless old duchess Adelphi.

2) A large proportion of our number simply will not attend. The event will be too long for some, the event will not have a new union to examine for others, it will be too early for many (too much that can still go wrong to leave the ranch and relax) and some will just lose interest in the centralisation of everything with NUSL and make do with visiting a couple of unions in June and July to

see what they are up to and pick up the things that they need there.

So what if my prophecy comes true??? Well, we can always go back to the old method and find a new union venue for 2007. Yes we could but, as all marketing gurus will tell you, it takes 5 times more effort to attract a new customer than it does to keep one. So, is the lesson keep it going in the right direction or spend years trying to rebuild to get back to where we are now? If you don't, I feel that you will lose something special. Yes, people will still talk and network and meet and share, but the

conference as it stood was a great thing and I feel that we may have underestimated its value when we, the small few who did vote, returned a verdict, without full debate. If it's not too late, lets reopen the debate and try and stimulate some real discussion on why we are doing this. It is worth noting that, in all our discussions with colleagues from many unions all over the country, including members of the co-co, we could not find a single supporting voice that thought that this was a good decision. Or what? A rebel conference in competition with the April Gig? Who could ever suggest such a thing?

## Innovate or just replicate – a short defence of experimentation with the AMSU Conference



**Author:** Mark Grayling  
AMSU Chair

I felt the need to respond to Paul's article as although I was happy to see it published to encourage debate, some of his comments are in my opinion unfair and ill-informed.

The conference dates back to the origins of SUSOC and was originally an Easter gathering of permanent secretaries i.e. General Managers only. There has been almost continuous discussion over recent years about the future of the conference<sup>1</sup>. This year there was a consultative phone poll and then a postal ballot of all AMSU member

Unions – which resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of change for 2006

Increasingly colleagues have been voting with their feet and the conference has not retained attendees for more than a couple of years in their careers, with some honourable exceptions, as the style, format and even the content have been much the same each year despite the best efforts of willing volunteers to improve things. Increasingly, it has been difficult to interest Unions in hosting the event as it is a great deal of work (on top of the day jobs) for little return other than exposing the host Union to a peer group who are not always positive and supportive in their feedback.<sup>2</sup>

The style of the proposed 2006 conference was clearly described in the paperwork that accompanied the ballot and this has been championed by the AMSU Co-ordinating Committee amongst others. The Adelphi aside, placing the events back to back will create economies of scale, transport costs and in time out of the office. The trading focus of the NUSL event will attract one audience and the management agenda of AMSU another but the cross over day will

allow a bit of mixing and cross fertilisation amongst the two (overlapping) groups. The Liverpool location will allow programming to include visits to up to three Unions rather than just the one that is under pressure to perform and impress. However, to assume that this is the new "model" AMSU conference from now on is to completely miss the whole point.

The seminar programme for Senior Managers and Union Presidents indicates that when the product is right new conference ideas can succeed quickly (they have been oversubscribed from the start) The debate is never closed but what is lost in trying something new when opinion about the status quo is, at best, mixed? The decision has only been taken for 2006, so 2007 could be a more traditional style AMSU conference if we want with 2008 be a joint AMSU/ACUI event?

1 See for instance Agenda issue 74 p2&3, 76 p3, 77 p2, 82 p43

2 My article in Agenda 77 p2 sought to challenge the prevailing view that the AMSU conference could and should never change

# London wins the Olympic race but what might it mean for Students' Unions?



**Author: Alex Stacey**  
ULU Sports Development Officer

One of many significant events that took place in the UK in July 2005 was the decision to award the right to host the 2012 Olympics to London. Nationally, BUSA has been involved in supporting the bid and, in London itself, the bid preparation has involved local SUs and sports departments and, as 2012 draws nearer, the benefits and the involvement is likely to increase. In future issues of Agenda, we hope to feature the experiences of student organisations from host cities of recent Olympics, and would welcome contributions of that type. Alex Stacey, ULU Sports Development Officer starts with the story of how the bid was won, what will happen next, and what it will mean for SUs.

## Introduction

On the 6th July 2005 at 12.46pm, Jacques Rogge announced that London would host the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. From the reaction of the London Bid team it had been a contest with Paris to the end but the strength of the London bid had done enough to secure more votes from the International Olympic Committee. This decision will have significant repercussions for sport at all levels and a host of other areas. The numerous spectators that will travel to watch the Games will boost tourism. Culture and education sectors will receive an increase in funding, and community cohesion will be vital in hosting a successful Games. 17,000 athletes and officials will attend the Olympic and Paralympic games, athletes will compete in a range of 26 different sports. A new 500 acre Olympic Park, in Stratford, will host 9 of the main facilities for the Games, 5 of which will remain after the Games as part of the legacy of the 2012 Games. The Olympic Park will be the largest urban park to be built in the last one hundred and fifty years.

The United Kingdom will be affected not only by the Games and what they bring but also the messages that they send out. London 2012 will not just be an Olympic and Paralympic Games for London but for the whole of the nation. Three years prior to the Games, athlete preparation camps will be dotted throughout the UK; these will bring up-to-date facilities, accommodation and add value to sport in the local area. The Olympic spirit will touch everyone. The positive impacts on the health and well being of the nation will become more pertinent.



## The transition team

At the moment, the London 2012 team is going through the transition phase and the London 2012 Company is being wrapped up and the new company, known as the "London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games", is being formed and will be charged with running the Games. Ninety full-time staff has been cut down to fifty full-time staff at present. This will take about six months and, then, London 2012 will start taking form and, in the New Year, a clearer picture of the volunteer programme will have been gathered and there will be more activity surrounding volunteering. Currently, over the last two years, London 2012 has invited anyone interested in volunteering to register their interest on the website. Anyone registered then receives a 'thank you' message and an update when progress has been made on the Olympic Bid and of other opportunities to volunteer within their local community.



### **What does it mean for Students' Unions?**

The knock-on effects for the Higher Education sector will be huge, particularly in terms of volunteering. It is estimated that up to 70,000 volunteers will be needed for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. There will be a real opportunity for Students' Unions, across the UK, to be part of the London 2012 volunteering programme. The training component of volunteering will be a vital cog in the delivery of the Games and this is often an underrated asset that students' unions have and are doing. The recruitment of volunteers, with the extra incentives of mixing with many different cultures and formulating one of the greatest displays on the planet, will be an exciting prospect.

Volunteering programmes will be led by organisations such as Student Volunteering England and will look to encompass the whole of the higher and further education sector. The challenge will

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Voluntary services departments in unions will hold the key to a sizeable number of willing volunteers and will know the motivations of that resource.

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be to engage with students who are not interested in sport and who view the Games as a sports event only. There has already been a large amount of work on the volunteering programme that could run, with several London 2012 committees established to address this issue.

The Olympic and Paralympic Games will be far more than this, and this message will need to be effectively communicated. The 'qualifying' and accreditation procedure for volunteers for the Games promises to be as simple and as accessible as possible. Yet, it will also be a chance for Students' Unions to feed in. Voluntary services departments in unions will hold the key to a sizeable number of willing volunteers and will know the motivations of that resource. Questions will also be raised which are central to Students' Unions, such as how graduate volunteers are tracked? Are alumni networks at higher education organisations sufficient to keep in contact and communicate volunteering opportunities? Should a form of 'tracking'

be introduced to assist London 2012 in keeping volunteer numbers consistent? There is, arguably, a significant role for institutions to play and it will be an exciting challenge for all involved.

### **What is volunteering for an Olympic Games?**

Volunteering for the Games takes on a variety of forms and it is not just about assisting in the sporting context. Large numbers of volunteers will be needed to help with the transportation system. Security for the Games will also be of paramount importance and this will put more emphasis on the accreditation of athletes, officials and coaches. A substantial number of volunteers will be needed to help with this process. Spectator services are another part of the Games that will need a considerable number of volunteers, whilst the technology needed to run the O and PG again opens another avenue for specialised areas that higher and further education institutions can feed into. The experience and knowledge gained from the successful volunteering programme, which was run at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002, will also be helpful in developing the volunteer base.

In essence, Students' Unions have an exciting opportunity to get involved with a volunteering programme, which is unlike any other seen in the United Kingdom before. The emphasis though really is on grasping that opportunity and taking hold of it.

For more information please visit [www.london2012.com](http://www.london2012.com) and [www.volunteer2012.com](http://www.volunteer2012.com).

# Financial monitoring and reporting



**Author: Jon Berg**  
AMSU Treasurer and  
General Manager of the  
University of Teesside Students' Union

The question of what to report to elected officers in the way of financial information and in what form has long been an issue for managers to consider. However, today's environment for SUs adds a few extra factors to consider, such as how to report bad results, the closer scrutiny of the university and, increasingly, the debate about SU Governance as it relates to financial management. This also opens up again the debate about how much Executive officers should be concerned with the running of the organisation and shadowing the work of management, as compared to engaging with and representing students. The increasing concerns of

universities and the Charities Bill will probably question the effectiveness of financial regulation of public money that is solely conducted by elected students, who often lack financial experience and whose training is often dependent upon the people whose work they are scrutinising. As with so many aspects of how SUs are run, the absence of clear agreed standards or effective regulation do make it harder to convince stakeholders of the effectiveness of existing arrangements.

NUS has always provided finance training for sabbaticals and, in 2005, some of the material was provided by members of the AMSU Co-ordinating Committee. Below, we re-print the material used by NUS so that managers can see what Jon Berg, AMSU Treasurer and General Manager of the University of Teesside Students' Union, regards as the key elements that elected officers should ensure are being addressed by SU management in regard to finance.

## 10 questions to ask about your accounts

### Income and expenditure account

- Is total income on budget?
- If not, which areas are under or over, and why?
- Are all areas of spending within budgets?
- If not, is there an explanation that includes corrective action?
- Have there been any changes to our priorities that affect the budgets?

### Profit and loss account - trading operations

- Are sales and net profit ("bottom line") for the largest trading areas close to budgets?
- If not, why is each area better (and will this continue) or worse (and how is this being remedied)?
- Are the gross profit % and staff costs as % of sales close to targets?
- If not, why, and what is being done?

### Balance Sheet

- Are the bank balance and net current assets better/worse than last year's equivalent (and why)?

## Checklist for finance

### Checklist for finance – key roles

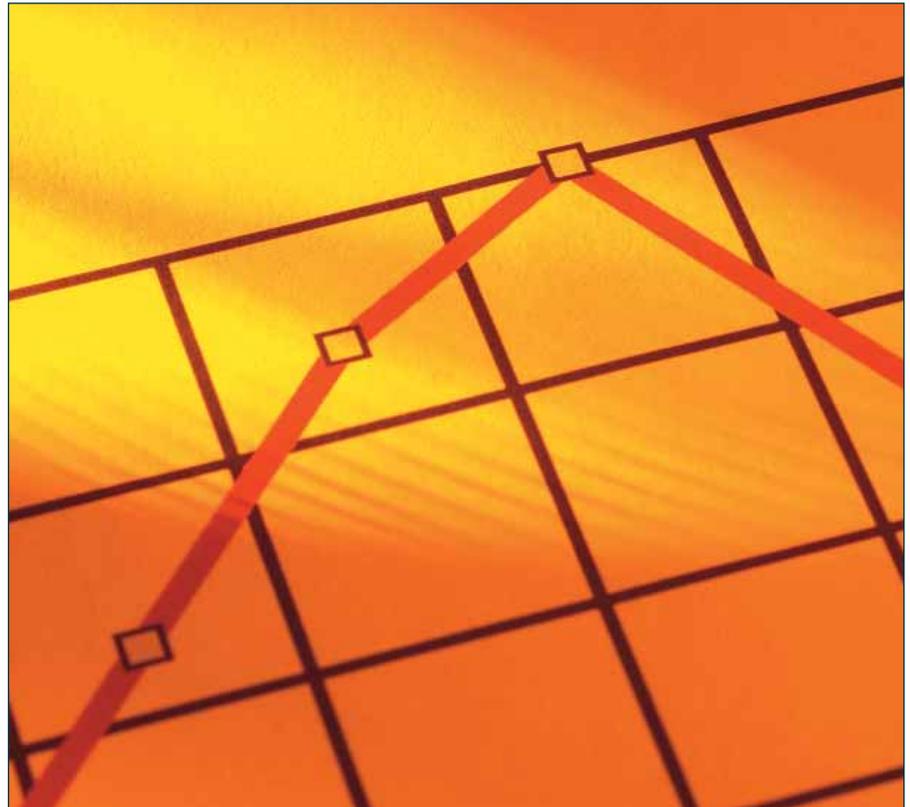
- Finance office responsible for processing all income and expenditure, filing these records and producing reports
- Every department and area has a designated budget holder who is involved in setting budgets, responsible for its finances and addressing all variances
- Officers and budget holders have on-screen access to information in accounts system

### Checklist for finance – monthly accounts

- Monthly accounts within 2 working weeks (not in Summer months as data isn't meaningful)
- Summary of income and spending with budgets
- Trading summary (profit & loss account) with budgets
- Balance sheet, compared to last year
- Commentary that highlights larger variances between actual and budget, noting causes and the action being taken
- Monthly accounts sent to a finance committee and to parent institution

### Checklist for finance – annual accounts

- Annual budgets are set before start of year but after updating business/department plans
- Major areas of income, expenditure, and trading are benchmarked against similar students' unions
- Budgets and forecasts prepared on revolving 2-3 year basis with sensitivity analysis
- Annual accounts are available and audited within 2 months of year end



### Checklist for finance – cashflow

- Main bank account reconciled weekly, deposit accounts monthly
- Cashflow forecasts and reports are used to anticipate any borrowing and ensure balances are placed in high interest accounts or funds
- Effective credit control procedures that ensure sales ledger balances are paid promptly to the Students' Union
- Suppliers are paid within agreed time limits

### Checklist for finance – systems

- Officers and staff have on-screen access to information in accounts system – read only
- Value Added Tax, Pay As You Earn and other taxes complied with – records and payments
- Fixed asset register of buildings, equipment, furniture and fittings, with regular inspection
- Finance manual with all procedures and controls
- Regular internal audits of systems and records – reports published with details of improvements being made.

## Introduction to QAA; does it really make any difference?

We return to a subject that has been featured repeatedly in this magazine in the last few years: the Quality Assurance Agency inspection process and the wider issue of student representation. The Editorial Board believes that this process is so fundamental to the role of SUs, and has enough implications for the future of HE, the student experience, and the role of SUs, as to be read by all staff, managers and officers in SUs, and not just those that deal directly with it. This set of articles looks back at how an institutional audit has affected a number of Universities, their students, and their Students' Unions, to consider its true impact.

We start with **Phil Benton**, who writes about the experience at Salford University and the lasting impact on its SU and officers, including its relationships with its members and the University. **Phil MacKay** writes about Anglia Polytechnic University, which failed their inspection. The section is finished with a range of comments from SUs around the country, about their experiences in relation to the QAA. Thanks to all those who contributed. We very much hope to feature further articles on this topic. We especially hope to look at how the system in Scotland is developing and the use of the student auditors and the support provided by NUS Scotland via SPARQS, as featured in Agenda 77. If you have a story to tell, or a point to make that could be used in future articles, please contact us.

### Agenda digest of articles about academic affairs & representation

Agenda magazine has existed for 17 years and 83 editions, and within its back issues are many articles that are still pertinent today. AMSU is turning these into a useful and accessible resource for staff and officers in SUs. All previous articles have been indexed and those on similar subjects will be brought together with an introduction and contents list to create a digest. The first of these is about education and student representation, and is available to download from the AMSU website, now. It contains numerous articles, including a number about QAA, specifically and Mike Day's complete and seminal history of student representation. We hope that it will be useful for SU staff and Officers to use in research, training, induction, professional studies etc. AMSU hopes to produce more of these in the future, and so, feedback of any kind about this will be invaluable.

## Salford and the QAA



**Author: Phil Benton**  
General Manager at the University of Salford Students' Union

**Phil Benton is General Manager at the University of Salford Students' Union. Here he writes about the impact of the QAA process at Salford, not least of which was upon the SU itself; its priorities and its relationship with the University.**

The University of Salford Students' Union took its first steps on the road to producing a Student Written Submission (SWS) towards the end of the 2002/03 academic year. We knew the QAA audit was coming for the University, but were, quite frankly, clueless about the long-term consequences it would turn out to have for the Union.

Our first encounter with the process came when the University's internally appointed QAA co-ordinator, Rowena Pelik, attended an Executive Committee meeting in May 2003. Rowena had been charged with leading the production of the University's Self Evaluation Document (SED). She came to meet the Executive Committee with a view to outlining the parts of the process that the Union could get involved with, including writing the SWS. This encounter also included outlining to us the timetable for producing the SWS, which was required for submission on the 31

October 2003. As the majority of the Executive Committee present were the outgoing officers, their response was one of great, next year's team can do something about it. Roughly translated, that meant me doing something about it until the new officers took over.

And so began a process for the Union that has led to a fundamental rethink of where we focus our work and resources, how we prove to the University we add value to the student experience, and what we might do in the future to enhance our role as the recognised representative organisation for students at Salford. None of these were planned as outcomes in May/June 2003. At that stage, our efforts focused on how we were going to produce the SWS when, for the next three months, there would be no one on campus to use in market research exercises that would allow the SWS to reflect student opinion.

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**Our failure to precisely match the actual distribution of students was used in some quarters as a reason to discredit the whole report as having methodological flaws.**

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Our first meeting with a QAA Assistant Director took place during officer handover. We used this as an occasion to brief the incoming officers about the Institutional Audit before going to the meeting. The briefing consisted of using

the information produced, in Agenda 75, by Julia Woodcock on how the Institutional Audit had worked at University College Chichester, and the way the Union had produced its SWS. The QAA Assistant Director, who had worked with Julia and her officers, David Cairns, turned out to be the same one meeting us, although Salford was eventually allocated to one of his colleagues for the final audit. In our meeting with David, he asked me if I knew Julia and how Chichester had gone about the SWS, as he thought it was an excellent example of how to proceed. As Julia had faced a similar situation to ours, in that the research and write up had to be completed in a condensed period of time at the start of an academic year, I was quite reassured to hear that the plan we were formulating was going to be both workable and likely to produce a result the auditors would welcome.

Over the summer vacation, the President, the Welfare and Education Officer and I formed a SWS Project Group, and mapped out exactly what our weekly targets would be up to the 31 October, in order to research opinions, analyse the results and produce the SWS. Around the same time, the Union appointed a Student Representation Co-ordinator, Kate Murphy, in a jointly funded post with the University. Kate's first responsibility was to join our Project Group and take the lead in the production of the SWS. From the start of the 2003/4 academic year, we had seven weeks until the submission deadline, and our strategy was to reach a production milestone each week.

As ever in life, things do not always follow the fantastic plan you set yourself at the start. Our research went well, if a little contrived. Our focus group stage almost accurately reflected the demographics of the University's population, however, it

was achieved through inviting students the officers knew to meet the demographics during the last weeks of the vacation. From those focus groups, we then managed to recruit ten students who were willing to act as researchers, and obtain 50 questionnaire responses each, from around the University. Again, by luck rather than accurate planning, we got a spread of students that was broadly similar to both the University's demographics and its distribution of students across academic Schools. Our failure to precisely match the actual distribution of students was used in some quarters as a reason to discredit the whole report as having methodological flaws. Interestingly, these criticisms usually came from academics in Schools where the SWS had questioned practices. Nonetheless, both research phases went well and according to the timetable. Things came a bit unstuck on the analysis of the research results.

Prior to starting, we cut a deal with a lecturer for his second year business studies students to input our research data and provide an analysis and commentary to inform the writing of the SWS. When push came to shove, the lecturer could not deliver what we needed to our timetable – we would have received the results some time in mid November. This resulted in us undertaking a rather laborious manual count of the responses across the 500 questionnaires, and some long winded data inputting into spreadsheets to get the statistical breakdowns of the responses. Thankfully, we discovered a high degree of consistency between our focus group findings and the outcomes of the research, and were able to turn this into a SWS that the Union was quite proud of. We did hear later that the some of the auditors had described our submission as one of the “darkest” they had seen. Personally, I thought we had been highly

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complimentary where praise was due, and had only offered criticism that could be backed up by student opinions from the research. (I'll leave a copy in the AMSU resource library and let you all be the judges of our degree of darkness).

Parallel to the operational production of the SWS, we were engaged in regular meetings with Rowena, the University's co-ordinator, with regard to what we thought might be published in the SWS, what she thought might be published in their SED, and were there any common themes we might like her to pursue on our behalf. I feel we had a highly productive relationship with Rowena, and that she took a great interest in what students were saying to us. She took some of the initial findings from our focus groups and ensured that the University's SED reflected those comments, and she was instrumental in ensuring that the issues we raised in our final SWS were followed up by the University, prior to the actual audit visit in March 2004.

It was the establishment of this relationship that enabled us to see that there could be some long-term opportunities arising from the audit that would benefit the Union. Rowena became a highly useful advocate of the Union's role within the University, and she regularly

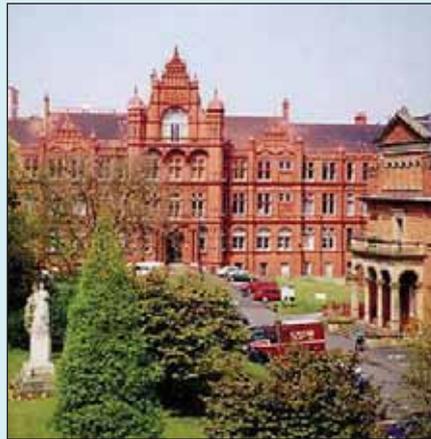
championed the issues we raised in the SWS when she talked about Institutional Audit in University Committees. Post publication, she also defended the SWS when academics that did not like its message tried to criticise the methodology behind its production. We were then able to use this opening to approach the Pro Vice Chancellor for Student Services to propose a joint review, by the Union and the Vice Chancellor's Executive Group, of the way in which the Union adds value to the student experience at Salford, which would be informed by what we had learnt in producing the SWS.

In researching the SWS, the constant theme we faced was how deeply students care about the issues that affect whether or not they complete their courses to a satisfactory level. The biggest reflection the Union went through was how poorly we had been responding to these issues. We pride ourselves on having excellent student representation opportunities on University Committees and have excellent access to the senior decision makers within the University. The Union has made good use of these opportunities and access, but usually to represent views and opinions gathered via elected officers, through monitoring case trends in the Advice Centre or through individual representations by students to officers. The SWS research confirmed that to make students feel the Union made a difference to them, it had to re-engage with them at a School-based level.

The first step was in place before we underwent the QAA process. In 2003 the University agreed to jointly fund the post of Student Representation Co-ordinator to recruit, train and develop student course representatives. The success of this post's first year led to us making a proposal to the University to fund the creation of a

dedicated student representation and support services department within the Union. For many of you, that will hardly seem like a ground breaking operational development for the Union. However, at Salford, we have spent the last 20 years or so developing the Union down the path of being a relatively financially successful student trading service provider, backed up by the provision of student sporting activities and facilities. The activities that the movement would badge up as "membership services" have always existed, but have never really been promoted or celebrated as front line, *raison d'être* services by the Union. The QAA process highlighted the need to put our representation and student support functions centre stage, and use them as the foundations on which to prove to the University that the Union plays a unique and irreplaceable role in enhancing the student experience. The new funding will pay for 3 new posts, over the next two years, all of which will be focused on enhancing the student representation, support and development activities of the Union.

Another equally important outcome of the QAA process at Salford has been the approach the University takes to monitor and improve its own service quality provision. The overall audit report gave the University the top mark of "broad confidence". Refreshingly, the University has not just taken this feedback and basked in the glow. Instead, it created a Quality and Standards Unit, led by Rowena Pelik as Director of Quality and Standards. This Unit not only deals with the quality of the University's academic standards, but also of the University's non-academic support services. Academically, the Unit has become the Union's key point of contact for raising concerns identified by student course representatives, or for us



to seek recognition of the Schools that exhibit good practice in responding to the needs of their students. To tackle issues of quality within the student support services, the Unit has employed a Quality & Standards Officer charged with working across service boundaries to ensure that there is cohesion and uniformity in the standards of customer service offered to students. Refreshingly, the Union's first encounter with the postholder saw us being told that she wanted to know exactly what students thought of the service they were receiving from the University, no matter how critical, as it was her task to build a culture of high performing, quality services across the institution.

It would be churlish to pretend that the Union's SWS has been the single causal factor in these changes. However, without going through that process, the momentum to change the Union's focus would not have begun. In Agenda 63, and again in Agenda 77, Peter Cadogan's model of analysing a Students' Union's key relationships (with its members, its parent institution and its staff) suggests that a high performing Union should strive to foster a partnership approach with its parent institution. The partnership

approach indicates that a University sees its Students' Union as a key partner in delivering the University's strategic framework, and that interaction between the two produces a positive force for development. The QAA process has directly contributed to the Union and the University of Salford setting out a plan to work in partnership, particularly in the provision of student support services and student activity facilities. The Union has been able to create a plan to improve the way it represents student opinion beyond the student officer inner circle, and the University has backed the strategy with new funding to ensure the Union is not moving resources from its existing activities in order to change focus.

In addition, the Union has been fortunate in having two successive Union Presidents who have been wholly committed to placing representation at the heart of our activities, and who have firmly believed in the need for Executive Committee officers to be active representatives of the student body, seeking student opinions to inform their own. Their determination that the SWS should be the beginning of a developmental process, rather than an interesting diversion from the Union's traditional outlook, has developed an atmosphere enabling the Union to engage the University in its agenda of change. Whether the whole institutional audit process has changed the University itself is hard to evaluate. What is certain is that it has changed the relationship between the Union and the University, to such an extent that both parties now have a shared understanding of what the Union contributes to the student experience, and that the University is a willing partner in the Union's plans to further enhance that contribution.

## QAA: It certainly made a difference at APU!



**Author:** Phil Mackay  
General Manager  
Anglia Polytechnic Students' Union

Phil Mackay is the General Manager at Anglia Polytechnic Students' Union, and was also a student and a sabbatical officer there in the mid 1990s. As one of the few institutions to receive a negative verdict from the QAA ("limited confidence") how this came about, and the response from the college, is especially interesting.



The advent of the QAA Institutional Audit has come as a wake up call to APU. The institution was one of the first (and certainly not the last) to receive the "limited confidence" judgement. This report initially sent shock waves around the University's senior management, but, all in all, the University has taken it very well and responded with radical changes to quality assurance, curriculum structure and University management.

APU has grown beyond all recognition in the last ten years, from probably less than 10,000 students to almost 30,000 in 2005. During this time, growth has been the priority together with the development of a new Campus in Chelmsford. This has led to a lack of focus on quality assurance, in my view. The University also allowed the development of huge numbers of different courses through module growth. This growth in choice was attractive to

students, but did mean that there was possibly limited control on systems and procedures.

The Students' Union took up the opportunity to develop a Student Written Submission (SWS). Almost 1800 responses to a questionnaire were returned. This was the single biggest student survey the Union had ever undertaken. On reflection, more time should've been spent thinking about and looking at University systems and procedures. The QAA audit report, when it was published, accurately reflected the issues the Union had faced for a number of years – complex procedures, lack of accountability and action after endless meetings, etc. The Union did not report on these as well as it could've done, had it focused more attention on systems, rather than spending so much time on the data collection and analysis.

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The QAA reported that there was “limited confidence in the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards”.

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The process really made it clear to the Students’ Union that it needs more dedicated representation staff to develop the work in this area. To this end, the Union has now developed a proposal and almost agreed this with the University. This proposal would create a staff post to focus on the work. We are planning to focus on 40 reps in the first instance, to improve the quality of representation, and learn from this, before rolling out the programme further.

The audit report specifically mentioned the need for better representation. The QAA specifically recommended improvement to the systems by which feedback from students is analysed, acted upon and communicated, especially at an institutional level. APU has never fully invested in a student satisfaction survey. In the report, the auditors stated that the annual student feedback questionnaire report is “descriptive rather than analytical”. The audit team had “difficulty identifying where, when and how the

findings are debated, and how agreed actions are tracked and communicated with students”. This illustrates that lack of systematic analysis of student opinion within the University. Module evaluation forms, similarly, were used in different ways and required much greater consistency in administrative arrangements.

Since the publication of the report, APU has developed a full student satisfaction survey, with external support, and this is to be used comprehensively in the future to identify improvements.

The Student Written Submission was generally favourable towards APU. Students do feel that they generally have a good experience and are well taught. This came through in the Audit Report.

### The verdict

The QAA reported that there was “limited confidence in the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards”. It is clear that this is about systems and management rather than teaching and student experience, which are generally favourable.

The University has taken a very radical approach to dealing with the problems and aims to return to “broad confidence” within a year.

This verdict came at the right time for the new Vice Chancellor. He was given the ammunition to make radical changes. The following summarises the most significant changes which the University has already put in place:

- A complete reorganisation of University Management structure

- The creation of five new faculties rather than 9 academic schools
- Creation of new Deans’ roles in each school – one to focus specifically on quality assurance
- Creation of a new central unit to focus on quality
- A reduction in course pathways from over 3000 to less than 400!
- Agreement to move from a 10/20 credit module structure to a 15/30 credit module structure – this will be in place in 2006.
- Consideration of the relationship with the partner institutions – this is likely to lead to some radical changes in due course
- Develop of a new committee structure – new terms of reference and membership, giving greater clarity of responsibilities
- A new regime of planning and review

Overall, the changes are starting to make a difference in the culture of the University which will lead to a better institution. There has also been a reinvigoration into the institution, and certainly staff have greater confidence that they can achieve big, visionary ideas. This change is coming from senior management, and the changes can be partly explained by the QAA but also fall at the feet of the new leadership of the institution. One without the other simply would not work.

# QAA: Does it make a difference? Lessons from around the country 2005



**Author:** Matt Hyde  
General Manager of  
Goldsmiths College Students' Union

We received several contributions from students' union managers from around the country detailing their experiences of producing a Student Written Submission (SWS), as well as participating in an institutional audit and developmental engagements. Many of these contributions drew similar conclusions and, on the whole, the introduction of students and students' unions being placed at the heart of the institutional audit process has been welcomed as a generally positive experience. In some instances, participation in the QAA process has been overwhelmingly positive – for students, the students' union and the HEI. This article draws out some of the conclusions of students' union staff and officers and discusses these thematically.

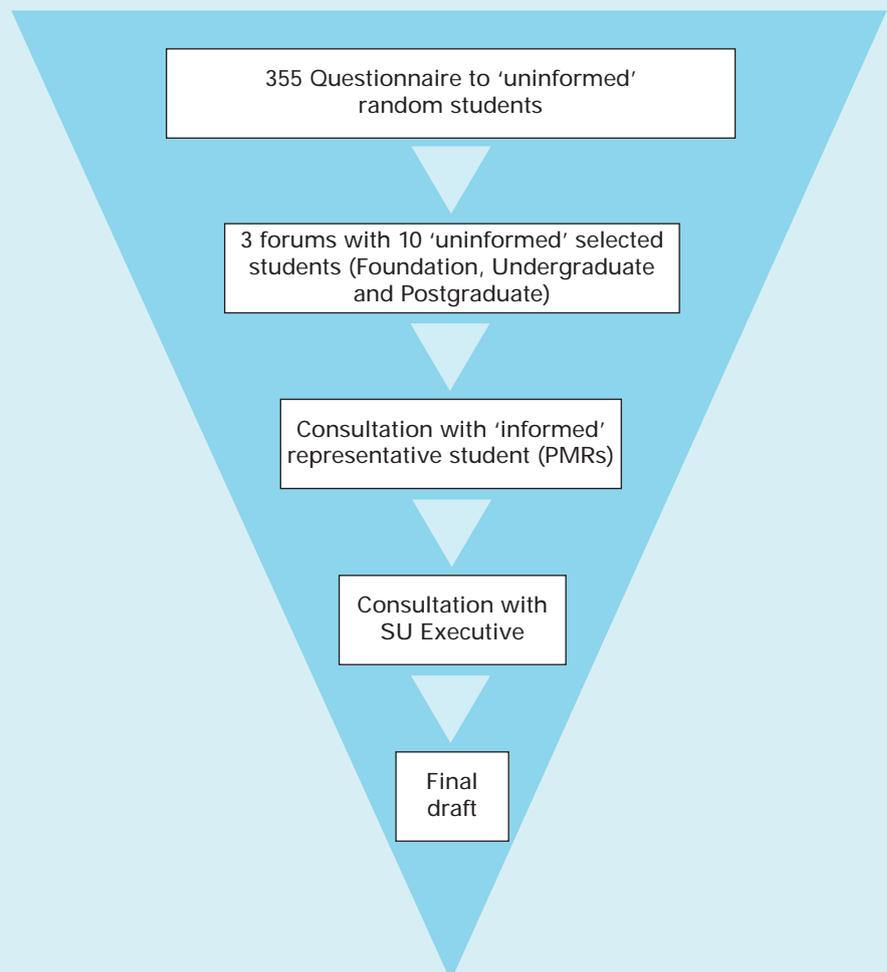
## Approach to the SWS

Students' Unions seem to have implemented a broadly similar approach to their research methodology when gathering evidence to formulate their Student Written Submissions. The main techniques and tools used were:

- Questionnaire (online and hard copy)
- Focus Groups
- Analysis of data from previous surveys (both University and Union)
- Referencing heavy trends, issues and complaints arising from a Union's academic advice team

- Information sought during the training of Course Representatives
- Data from Programme Monitoring Reports
- SU Advice Centre Annual Report
- Information gauged during developmental engagements
- SU Executive Committees

Goldsmiths College Students' Union used the following approach to gather evidence to formulate its Student Written Submission, identifying 5 levels of consultation:



Agenda recently reported how some Unions have engaged students with the process. Birmingham University Guild of Students (BUGS) ran a poster teaser campaign – 'The QAA is coming . . . check your email' – to specifically target students who were not the 'usual suspects'. They initially made no reference to what the QAA was until the students opened their email – they were told that students thought the QAA, was a new club night! The email then explained the QAA process and provided a link to the questionnaire.

Several Unions talked about the struggle of capturing data over officer handover period and at the end of the Summer term. James Hutchinson, Membership Support Manager at Goldsmiths College Students' Union said 'one of the greatest pressures on the process was time . . . in the midst of analyzing data, in preparation of a first draft report, we were also going through the induction period with new sabbatical officers, which meant a very steep learning curve for all concerned.'

### **Response by the University to the SWS**

Generally, SWS's around the country seem to have been well received by parent institutions, though, inevitably, where there has been criticism, some academics and HEI senior managers became defensive. Where these criticisms have been overcome, key relationships have been established with sections of the academic community (particularly between the students' union and HEI staff dealing with quality affairs).

The University of Leeds was audited by the QAA in 2003/04, with the Student Written Submission co-ordinated by LUU presented in November 2003. Aidan Grills, Membership Services Manager at Leeds University Union, writes 'At the time, we were in the process of cascading the research findings for the SWS to individual faculties of the University. This was the first time LUU had presented any report of this nature and depth to the University academic community. A number of Deans were understandably defensive about the

report and its findings and, on the basis of feedback, a little unnerved at student reps delivering such a report in their faculty.

Each Dean was supplied with a full copy of the research data and encouraged by LUU to test our findings . . . the Inspection Team followed-up all our recommendations, which was clearly the key objective. During the process, a closer working relationship was struck up between LUU and the University Quality Management Enhancement Unit (QMEU). As a key driver for change in the University, this department is a key political ally of the Union, and has expressed similar views to Union officers on issues of teaching quality, assessment and personal tutoring. The delivery of our SWS cemented this relationship. Although we were slow to capitalise upon this initially, the QMEU have just agreed to fund our programme of representation, to guarantee postgraduate students are represented at Faculty and School level.' Likewise, at Goldsmiths College, the Head of Quality Affairs the Membership Support Manager and Welfare and Academic Affairs President meet on a monthly basis.

UWE Students' Union noted that, during the data collection, resistance was met from the University and they were prohibited from collecting data in lectures.

There has been a mixed response towards whether or not recommendations have been acted upon, with the common response being that some (though not all) recommendations were acted upon. Other people noted it was perhaps too early to evaluate how many recommendations have been acted upon.

Trish O'Neil of the Liverpool Students' Union (Liverpool John Moores) noted that the overall theme in their SWS 'seemed to be that those students who had, and made use of, tutorial support, web based learning systems and had responsive teaching staff were happy. Some of the recommendations made in the SWS have been acted upon, one directly due to the LSU SWS and the other probably because the University's submission also reflected this area of need.'

UCLAN Students' Union produced a matrix of recommendations within their SWS. Bryn Davies writes 'The matrix . . . was taken on board by the University and formed an action plan, reviewed regularly until the SU was happy that all points had been addressed. In fact, the University has requested that we produce a similar, albeit less thorough version of the matrix, on an annual basis – a pro-active approach from the University and very welcome by us.'

And John Elsmore, General Manager of the University of Wolverhampton Students' Union, commented on similar levels of cooperation with their University throughout the process, writing 'it was an extremely collaborative process. We were constructively critical across a number of key areas, but in each case we had identified these with the University, well in advance, giving us both the opportunity to outline to the auditors what we had already considered doing to remedy these issues.'

John Gilfillan, of the University of Essex Students' Union, gave tangible examples of how the QAA had left a mark on the work of the University and shaped policy. He writes 'the student submission has given our officers, and other student representatives, more confidence that their observations are valid and an accurate assessment of the situation under discussion. A current example of this is the recent resolution of the University Senate to adopt a uniform system of Marks Penalties for submission of late coursework. In the face of a 50:50 split between the Academic departments, as to a zero tolerance position or a uniform penalties policy, the Union would take the recommendations from the final report, advocated a single policy across the University, as opposed to the "it ain't broke, why fix it" approach of many of the academic departments. Indeed, when the decision came to choose one of the policies, the University sided with the Union, and it was the contribution of Student Senators who were identified as having influenced a key number of their fellow senators.' Tamoor Ali, Vice-President Academic and Welfare at Essex says, "[The SWS] has allowed everyone involved in

academic representation from the University and Students' Union to learn about students' needs and work towards common goals.'

Likewise, James Hutchinson at Goldsmiths noted the value of the SWS as a campaigning document, suggesting that the key period for discussion with the parent institution is between the submission of the SWS and the briefing meeting with auditors. 'In this period we sent copies of the SWS to every member of SMT, requesting a response the week before our meeting with the auditors, as it would, clearly, impact upon our ability to answer specific questions relating to our recommendations. One of our main recommendations related to the opening hours of the library – an issue that has been unresolved over the last 10 years. Miraculously, we negotiated extended hours to start a few weeks after the audit. Thus, the imminent visit of the QAA auditors significantly sped up the notoriously slow wheels of the College's decision making process. So, even before the final report has been published, the involvement of students in the process has made a difference.'

However, concerns were raised about cooperation from the HEI at UWE. Staff and sabbaticals were present at the student briefings, just prior to meeting the auditors (after much negotiation). It was at these briefings that the Students' Union became aware that, on occasions, University staff members formed part of the student groups for the Institutional DATs. An example of this was where a research student, who was also a visiting lecturer, met the auditors together with his students which, in their opinion, did not facilitate open discussion.

They also witnessed students being informed of services and support that they were previously unaware of. It was apparent that even before the briefings, the students had met with their departments and were generally concerned about saying the 'right thing' for the benefit of their

department. It was apparent that answers to particular questions were rehearsed and students were informed that the conclusions of the QAA could alter the external perceptions of the worth of their degrees. Laura Porter, UWE Students' Union, writes 'What student would then say anything negative about their academic experience, in view of this?'

UWE Students' Union did say, however, that their University saw the SWS as an example of good practice and recognised the approach as a valuable one. The University is discussing the issues raised in the SWS but at present there has been limited advancement of the key student issues.

### **Impact on the Students' Union as a result of the SWS**

A common response from contributors was that the Students' Union itself had learned as much about their own procedures and outputs as the parent institution, as a result of going through the QAA process.

For instance, BUGS said that their Student Written Submission noted that some students had problems knowing who their Student Reps were, and, as a direct result of this comment, they developed a Student Reps' Website.

The University of Wolverhampton Students' Union also said how the process changed how they worked with course reps. John Elsmore says 'Our relationship with course reps is changing as we are starting to find out who they are! We directly elect the school/faculty reps, so are able to communicate with them – but the individual academic schools would never get around to collating and telling us who the course and module reps were, until it was too late. This is changing as a direct result of the audit process – and, while still slow this year, we have been heavily involved in getting it right for next. As to the elected officers priorities – issues around communication and engaging students have featured heavily in all of the executive

committee objectives – because University Personnel are keen to get involved, and there are a number of ongoing projects officers who have found themselves in the middle of work that has been quite exciting and they have actively pursued outcomes.'

And at Essex, as a result of the recommendations in their SWS, the SU has developed its SSLC Rep system and now offers enhanced training for the course reps as well as support for reps, before meetings in form of briefings and debriefing following meetings.

The Liverpool Students' Union (at Liverpool John Moores University) noted the following positives and negatives for their Union.

The positives for LSU were:

- It offered an opportunity for cross-departmental working.
- The Sabbaticals enjoyed the face-to-face contact with students.
- Overall, the responses were very positive and lots of good practice across the university was identified.
- There is a view that a 'mini – version', with properly planned follow up, would be a useful annual exercise.

The negatives were:

- The amount of data was vast and the time to analyse it was too limited.
- The timescales make it quite difficult to maintain enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment towards any meaningful follow up work.
- It was felt, at times, that some of the liaison exercises, conducted by the HEI with LSU at the time, were tokenistic and designed to fulfil the sections of the HEI's report, rather than indicating a genuine interest in the content of the SWS.'

UWE Students' Union said that some of the reps now understand more clearly how the Union officers can take up their issues at a University committee level, and are more likely to feed their issues up to the sabbaticals.

And, the University of Wolverhampton Students' Union also got honorable

mentions in the University Response, high praise at Board of Governors - and perhaps, most importantly, key representation on the various task forces and project groups to come out of the report to work on the recommendations.

### General Conclusions

So, on the whole, the experience has been a positive one for students' unions, but there has been a mixed response as to how many recommendations in the SWS have been addressed by parent institutions.

A positive example of the process would be Sarah Jeffries, Higher Education Policy Manager at BUGS, who writes 'from writing the student submission to the actual audit, the process has had countless benefits. We engaged students that would not normally be part of, or indeed be interested in, the quality assurance process at the University. Although the process was very resource and time intensive, it has shaped some of our future priorities. I would definitely go through it all again - roll on 2010!

Similarly, Trish O'Neil of the Liverpool Students' Union noted that 'on balance, my view is that producing the SWS was an extremely positive exercise because it is core to our purpose as an SU to represent students' views, and this was one of the largest surveys undertaken for several years at LSU. To be able to accurately reflect the student view has been a useful aid in lobbying the University, and writing this has reminded us to brief the new sabbaticals in June about the SWS, to enable its continued use as a campaigning tool!'

And, Jon Elsmore at Wolverhampton says 'the University has always been a slow mover, but they are determined (as are we) to be able to demonstrate real and evidenceable improvements against all of the key recommendations. The speed of change can be frustratingly slow and the process of endless task forces, steering groups and the like is cumbersome - but we are maintaining an approach of keeping hammering away at the issues and waving

the QAA report in front of committees until we get there!!'

Nevertheless, John Gilfillan, at Essex University Students' Union, commented that the Students' Union involvement in the QAA process was not welcomed by all departments. He said 'the SU has campaigned consistently on a uniform approach to Marks Penalties within University Departments and, after a year's hard work with Student Reps and University officers, there is now one policy across the University, rather than the twenty-four different policies we had beforehand. The culture within the University Management, on many issues, has been seen to be more in line with the policies and views of the Union, but some individual departments are very reluctant to listen to external advice. QAA is regarded as being a device to remove much of their ability to argue that each department has good reason to have vastly differing policies and procedures.'

And UWESU deemed the process a qualified success, saying 'the opportunity to write an SWS is extremely valuable and has provided a focus for our representation activities. A good SWS can inform the QAA, the University and even the Union, but it may not necessarily do all three. In our case the QAA used the SWS to shape the agenda for the audit visit, but seemingly ignored its recommendations. The University enacted some changes but was largely concerned about appearing to respond to issues rather than taking direct action. The Union used the statistical legitimacy of the SWS to support its arguments and shape its direction but was more successful in some areas than others.'

### Some Learning Outcomes

#### 1. *Think about what happens after the Audit*

Aidan Grills, LUU, writes 'I would encourage any Union, undertaking work towards a QAA submission now, to think and plan beyond the inspection

process alone. Consider how the results can be dissected within your institution to have a real impact for the students in the short term. QAA can certainly be a driver for a changed perception of the role Unions can play, and a real resource for officers and student representatives at a localised or institution-wide level.

#### 2. *Opportunities for National Collaboration on Research Findings*

Aidan goes on to say 'On a national level, there is a clear opportunity for Unions to collaborate, by sharing research findings and identifying national or sector trends in particular subject areas. This could easily form the basis of work to lobby the bodies responsible for Higher Education policy.'

#### 3. *There are no embedded procedures provided for by the QAA that Universities must follow in terms of the selection of students for the Institutional DATS.*

UWE Students' Union believes that guidance on this issue would be beneficial in order to ensure a true and accurate representation of the student voice.

#### 4. *Make sure, if possible, that the Union is having input in to the selection of representatives.*

With thanks to: Sarah Jeffries, Higher Education Policy Manager, Birmingham Guild of Students (BUGS); Aidan Grills, Membership Services Manager, Leeds University Union (LUU); Trish O'Neil, of the Liverpool Students' Union (LSU); Laura Porter of the University of West England Students' Union (UWESU), James Hutchinson, Membership Support Manager, Goldsmiths College Students' Union (GCSU), Bryn Davies, President of UCLAN, John Gilfillan of Essex University Students' Union and John Elsmore, General Manager of the University of Wolverhampton Students' Union, for their contributions to this article.

# The AMSU Survey – past present and future

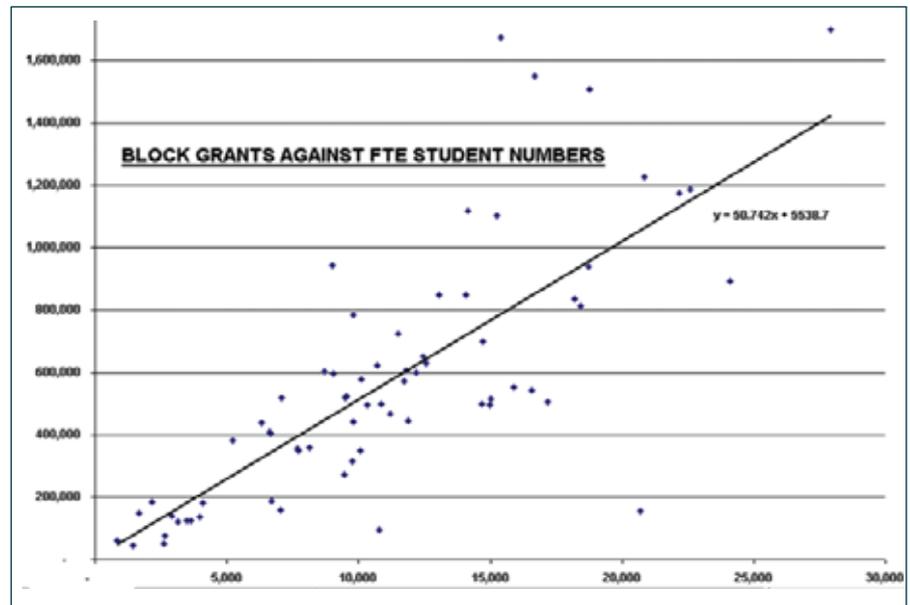


**Author:** Jon Berg  
AMSU Treasurer

Having provided some fascinating financial analysis of the state of SUs in recent editions of Agenda in this his latest article, AMSU's Treasurer Jon Berg, looks at the development of the AMSU Survey over the past 20 years and looks at its future. The survey is available to view and use via the AMSU website and Jon is always keen to hear about how people are using the data and suggestions for how to improve it.

The SUSOC Finance Survey was started as a source of comparative data on the income, expenditure and trading operations of UK students' unions. At that time SUSOC was an abbreviation of the Students Union Senior Officers Conference, a name which was dropped as our organisation evolved into SUSOC and then AMSU, the Association for Managers in Students Unions.

Initially the Survey data was collected using paper questionnaires, analysed in Excel and printed out in book form for annual release



“ This scatter graph shows the amount of block grant received by UK students' unions plotted against the number of students at their particular institution.

The line represents the average of about £51 pounds per student with the dots above the line representing students' unions getting more than average funding. In previous years some less well funded students' unions have used similar graphs to highlight their position below the line as part of their proposals for more funding.”

at the Easter and summer conferences. By the 1990's the questionnaire was issued on a floppy diskette with results being published on paper. The growth of the Internet heralded an e mail version of the questionnaire which increasing quantities

of data, and the results were published on floppy disk and CDR. When amsu.net arrived with its online Resource Library the AMSU Survey had found its natural place.

As well as the committed managers and staff who complete and return their

students' union's questionnaires, there are an increasing range of users of the results. Traditionally there were seen to be two groups of users, analysts engaged in work on specific parts like bars, and general readers wanting to know about the key financial trends for the year. The Survey session at AMSU Conference has evolved to fill this need, and the presentation is available from [amsu.net](http://amsu.net) to any registered member of staff or officer.

With increasing financial pressure on students' unions, the Survey data is valued by managers and officers interested in comparing their students' union with others in the UK. It has been widely recognised that different types of parent institution generally have different students' unions, partly due to the historical circumstances of the institution's creation and partly due to the academic and demographic profile of its students. The location of the campus can also be a significant factor, e.g. students' union election turnouts are proportionately higher at rural campus sites than urban multi-site institutions. MSU Survey includes a tool called "families" allowing the tables of data for students' unions to be filtered to only show those for similar types of institutions.

There have been some practical applications of the AMSU Survey data. For example the graph of block grant income against student numbers – please see graphic – shows the scatter or range of funding received by students' unions, and has been used as part of campaigns to gain extra funding. Another example is the graph showing the gross profit percentage (GP%) for all the bars in the Survey – see graphic. This clearly shows the range from lowest gp% to highest and a number of students' unions have compared their performance to this.

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**“We found the funding graph invaluable in our block grant negotiations . . . it helped us to persuade the University to increase our subvention by over 20%.”**

**Graham Gaskell,  
General Manager,  
University of  
Westminster Students'  
Union**

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Aside from sales and other “top line” income figures, comparisons can be made between the net profits for similar operations in different students' unions. There are some limitations to the data, mainly due to the allocation of costs between different activities. For example, door or security staff costs may be included in the bar staff costs, entertainments staff costs, or another section. This may limit the detailed comparisons but in more obvious cases the particular students' union's figures can be excluded from the data being used. Not all students' unions recharge central finance and management costs to trading activities, and there can be some variation in trading net profit due to this.

The Survey contains information about the democratic activities of Students' unions.

Data on elections includes the annual turnout at each students' union, how many posts were contested and how many candidates stood. It lists how many sabbatical officers there are at each students' union and their salary.

Some of the previous surveys have included questions on specific areas like Investors in People, computer software, or the areas in square metres of different parts of the students' union. This data is available from [amsu.net](http://amsu.net) and so it can be worth checking there first.

#### **Some ideas for the future . . .**

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This year's questionnaire is going to be available online to complete. We are going to be including some questionnaires about preparation for the new Charities Act and the student development and activities in students' unions.

The existing Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) for charities explains how these annual accounts for a charity should be published as a Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA). Some students' unions have a SOFA and a set of traditional style accounts as an appendix. Without going into detail both reports can be produced from one set of accounting records. However, most of us would readily admit that the SOFA is hard to read, over summarises trading figures, and that we rely upon the traditional accounts for most purposes. With the new Charities SORP due for adoption next year we have an opportunity to develop an approach together that makes our SOFAs both clear and consistent. Moreover we could include our traditional accounts as an appendix in a standard format that facilitates inter-union comparisons.

# The challenge facing students' unions: European perspectives



**Author:** Alex Bols  
Policy Adviser at Universities UK

Alex Bols is currently the Policy Adviser at Universities UK but, previously, was President at the University of Southampton Students' Union and a member of the NUS National Executive Committee, before becoming the Secretary General of ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe, between July 2001 and July 2004. As such, he is able to offer a fascinating perspective on how events of the last 10-15 years have deeply effected student organisations in Europe, and how this can be used to hold up a mirror to own our organisations and issues in the UK.



## Introduction

The last three decades could almost be described as the golden age of students' unions in the UK. Relatively large block grants from the University, especially when compared to European counterparts, significant income from commercial activities, such as bars, shops, catering and travel agencies. This combined with de facto compulsory membership and real involvement in decision making, as well as the decision taking processes across the University, has often resulted in complacency amongst students' unionists across the UK.

At a time when students' unions are more recognised than ever by their institutions they are also drifting away from their

students with less students voting in elections, student positions on university committees going unfilled and fewer students involved in various activities. Has the emphasis on making money to re-invest in the students' union resulted in the union taking its eye off the ball and losing its focus on representation? In my role as Secretary General of ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe, which is umbrella organisation of 48 National Unions of Students across 36 European countries, I have seen many different approaches taken by students' unions.

## Roots of student activism

Students have always been at the forefront of movements for democracy,

Falling numbers of students voting is something that is happening across the whole of Europe but there are many different ways of voting for national and local student representatives.

whether challenging Nazi rule in Prague, demonstrations in 1968 or in Tiananmen Square. This democratic spirit has always been at the core of students' unions, whether representing the views of students to decision makers, having democratic structures in their own organisation, or challenging injustice in the UK or around the globe. Even as recently as 1999, students have been instrumental in overturning an undemocratic and repressive regime, here in Europe. Students in Serbia were leading the challenges to the Milosevic regime, resulting in the uprising and resulting overthrow of the government.

As we approach the five-year anniversary of this student-led uprising, it is interesting to note that the student movement has gone from strength to strength with the Students' Union of Serbia (SUS) actively

involved in higher education decision-making. It was partly as a result of students forming together in groups that led to a strengthening of the student movement and the creation of a strong independent union. Having worked closely with many of the student representatives involved, it has been noticeable how focused they have been on representing their students, and how involved they have become in decision-making and higher education reform.

**Membership of students' unions**

Turning student activism and involvement in political movements into an active union of students is one of the hardest tasks. Accusations of being "bureaucrats", "selling out their principles" and separation from "real" students are levelled, often unfairly. Tackling this issue is dealt with in many different ways across Europe, ranging from organisations that only deal with representation to unions that cover all student activities, and having voluntary membership or compulsory membership.

It can be said that voluntary membership of students' unions is the norm across Europe. This has many impacts, in terms of the number of students that the union represents, as well as the financial stability of the organisation. But, equally, with less money there are lower expectations from students that the union will provide all their non-academic services. This results in the unions focusing on what they consider their core activities. However, the UK is not alone in having, almost, compulsory



membership, it being a common feature in Nordic countries as well as in Austria.

In Sweden, for example, it is compulsory for students to be members of the students' union, as outlined in Swedish Law. The students are expected to pay a membership fee, set by the students' union, at the beginning of each semester. The students' union must be democratic and its constitution approved by the Board of the university. This system, "karobligatoriet", whilst controversial, ensures that students' unions have a solid financial basis, and is supported by the universities by their insistence on showing the students' union card before students take exams. This system ensures that students' unions are active in involving students who, in turn, feel more involved, as they have to pay the fee directly to the students' union. It also means that, if the students' union sets the fee too high, the students will vote the executive out at the next election.

UK students' unions are very lucky, with their high annual income paid for by the institution at significantly higher rates than other countries can charge their students

directly, whether with voluntary or compulsory membership. It should, however, be noted that, whilst this institutional funding is relatively secure at the moment, it has been attacked in the past and the institution can choose to lower the amount that the students' union receives. The amount received from charging the students may be less but, equally, so would the expectation of services and could possibly result in higher involvement from the students having to pay the fees directly.

### Voting for student representatives

The structures of students' unions vary as does the way that representatives are elected. The annual voting for students' union officers and delegates for NUS conference, who then elect the National Executive Committee, has been hit by falling turnouts amongst most students' unions across the UK. Most students' unions have turnouts of between 10-25% and is something that has been targeted as an issue by students' union officers in recent years. With almost compulsory membership the onus is on the students' unions to represent all their students, to prevent universities looking at the funding they give unions, if they perceive a democratic deficit.

Falling numbers of students voting is something that is happening across the whole of Europe, but there are many different ways of voting for national and local student representatives. In Austria, for example, elections are held every two years for both national and local



representatives. These elections for representatives at all levels; department, faculty, university and national are held at the same time to maximise the turnout, with students directly voting for the representatives at all levels. At the national level, there is a student parliament of 45 people, that is made up of representatives based on the percentages that each party (based on a list system) receives at the election. These parties then try and form coalitions to make up a majority, and this coalition then fills the elected positions within the national union.

The last election, held 12 months ago, resulted in a national turnout of 30% i.e. over 50,000 students voting, with campus universities having turnouts of over 40%. At the last election, the 45 national mandates were allocated as such: 14 conservatives; 14 greens; 10 socialists; 3 independents; 2 communists; 1 liberal; and 1 freedom party. This resulted in the current "red/green" coalition who held discussions about how to allocate national positions, as part of the coalition talks, and have now been in office for almost a year.

These elections at the national level are held simultaneously as elections at the

local level. Local union councils are elected in a similar way to the national level with students voting for party lists and the parties with the most votes (either individually or through coalitions) taking the executive positions within the students union. It is also worth noting that student representatives comprise 25% of University Senate.

This system of course has some disadvantages, such as its reliance on groups of students coming together to form lists in order to fight elections but by holding the elections at the same time as national student elections with high profile campaigning results in high turnouts and interest amongst students as well as in national media.

#### Interesting Fact:

All student unions in Austria are called OH – Österreichische HochlerInnenschaft – whether at the local or national level, with local unions being called, for example, OH Vienna and the national level being just OH. This ensures greater identification between local and national unions, particularly at election time.

### Services and activities

Students unions across Europe provide a variety of different services for students, though few are as developed as here in the UK, ranging from organising student discounts to putting on parties. But whilst students unions provide a variety of services the one thing that they all do, and is seen as their *raison d'être*, is the representation of students. It is also interesting that those commercial

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## Unions need to decide whether they should be fighting back to get their market-position or looking to the future and reclaiming the initial reason of creating students unions

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activities that they do provide are provided because they are a service, rather than purely for the commercial value of such an activity.

Students' unions in the UK are coming under increasing pressure from commercial organisations that are competing directly with the union to corner the student market. This ranges from student travel agencies cutting into the already tight margins of the SU travel shop, the university catering department competing with the unions' own facilities to the 'It's a Scream' pub attracting students into their bars with "student-like" atmospheres. Unions need to decide whether they should be fighting back to get their market position or looking to the future and reclaiming the initial reason for creating students' unions, i.e. representing students and providing them with services that can't be provided by anyone else.

When we get back to the essentials of what a students' union is for, and what service can't be provided by another provider, it always comes back to the representative function.

Students' union involvement in commercial activities is often justified by saying that the purpose is to provide a service to students and also to make money that can then be ploughed back in to other, more core activities of the students' union. But there is a fine line between commercial activities becoming so commercial that they are no longer a service for the students, and other activities that would be a useful service, even if commercial, are rejected because they are not considered profitable enough. It is also worth emphasising the point that not all students are interested purely in getting involved in representation, and that the other services that the union provides are often their only contact with the union. By the students' union meeting their non-academic needs and providing services that help create the university experience, it shows the relevance of the students' union to the everyday lives of students, and encourages them to get involved in the democratic processes. It is interesting that in the Netherlands, where the activities and the democratic roles are kept very separate, there is a level of involvement in the representative structures even further below the "apathy" levels seen here in the UK.

It also gets back to a more fundamental question, which unions need to ask themselves, about whether the union and university should be providing all the



needs of students and creating their own community, at the exclusion of the local community and city where the university is based. With divisions in the town and gown regularly raising their head in the press, how much is fuelled by the separation of the university community from the local community?

### Conclusion

The main conclusion would be to show that there are many different ways of organising students' unions and the most important aspect whenever organising an activity, is deciding whether it is of fundamental importance to the students and could the money be better spent on other activities, whilst at the same time recognising that different students are attracted to get involved by different activities. Not all students will want to be involved in representation but will want to get involved in sports or social activities.

for more information about ESIB visit, [www.esib.org](http://www.esib.org)

## An update on the recent changes to employment law



**Author:** Stuart McBride  
TLT Solicitors

### **Compromise agreements should be tailored to the individual**

Due to a recent Court of appeal decision (*Hinton v University of East London*), for a compromise agreement to be effective in preventing an employee from bringing a claim, the catch all provision 'in full and final settlement of all claims' will not be effective. Compromise agreements need to specify the claims that are being compromised.



In this case, despite having signed a compromise agreement, Mr Hinton was allowed to proceed with a claim against his previous employers, under the whistle blowing provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996 (ERA), on the basis that the agreement failed to make specific reference to any whistle blowing claim or the relevant provisions of the ERA.

Comments were made by the judges that it was best practice for compromise agreements to contain a brief factual and legal description of the matters being compromised and that the use of a

standard forms which lists every form of employment right known to the law is not advisable.

To ensure protection from future claims, employers should now be careful to ensure that their compromise agreements make specific reference to each and every employment dispute that there has been with the employee. Employers are also advised to get the employee to warranty that they have no other claims against them and that they agree to repay any monies paid under the agreement if they then later make any claim.

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## **No Holiday Pay for Workers on Long Term Sick leave**

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Under the Working Time Regulations 1998 (WTR), every worker is entitled to 4 weeks' annual leave. A worker cannot accept a payment in lieu of actually taking the leave but on termination a worker is entitled to be paid for any holiday accrued but not taken, during the current holiday year.

Case law has extended these rights resulting in additional costs for employers. Firstly, the Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) decided that a worker was entitled to paid annual leave even if they were on long term sick leave, regardless of whether they had been at work at any time during the leave year. Secondly, the EAT allowed workers to claim for back dated holiday pay as an unlawful deduction of wages under the Employment Rights Act 1996. The effect of this was that workers could bring claims for unpaid holiday right back until 1 October 1998, when the WTR came into force – i.e. 7 years worth of holiday pay!

The recent case of *Inland Revenue v Ainsworth* has overturned both these decisions, for which many employers will be grateful.

The case decided that workers do not accrue entitlement to paid holiday whilst they are on long term sick (i.e. over 12 months). This approach is in line with the health and safety rationale behind the WTR, which does not apply if a worker is off work due to long term sickness.

It further decided that claims for holiday pay on termination can only be brought under the WTR and not as an unlawful

deduction of wages claim, therefore limiting claims to holiday accrued during the current leave year and not potentially the previous 7.

Unfortunately however, whilst the decision appears to be good news for employers, it has left unanswered a number of other questions. These include:-

1. What is the position for employees who have been off sick for less than 12 months – do they only accrue paid holiday on a pro rata basis for the time which they have been at work?

Following the health and safety purpose behind the WTR, this would appear to be the logical answer. However, this could of course create more work for employers in terms of calculations on termination. It should be remembered, in relation to contractual holiday entitlement over and above the 4 week minimum, unless otherwise specified, employees will be entitled to payment in lieu of this upon termination.

2. Should women on maternity leave accrue entitlement to paid holiday?

During Ordinary Maternity Leave (OML) the answer has to be, yes, because the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations 1999 specifically provide that during OML women are entitled to the same benefits apart from remuneration.

However, arguably during Additional Maternity Leave (AML), paid holiday entitlement under the WTR may not accrue, in the same way as for those on long term sick. Employers should

be wary of following this line, on the basis that it could be discriminatory on the grounds of sex. For the time being it is recommended that employers continue to let employees on both OML and AML accrue entitlement to paid holiday.

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## **Workers can still opt out of the 48 hour working week**

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Abolition of the opt out of the 48 hour maximum working week has been on the agenda of the European Council for some time now. If this went through, it would mean that, even if workers freely consent to working over the 48 hour maximum limit, employers would not be allowed to let them do so. However as The European Council has now failed to agree on the future of the opt-out, for the time being it will remain.

The UK government will shortly take over the EU Presidency and it is unlikely that they will pursue abolishment of the opt out during its reign. Progress cannot therefore now be expected until 2006.

## The birth of BUSA



**Author:** Mike Day

BUSA is 10 years old this year, and, as part of celebrating this, they commissioned Mike Day to write a history of national student sport covering the many organisations that predated BUSA. The story of how the fragmented and divided student sport sector finally came together is a fascinating one that Agenda is serialising in 3 parts. In this final part, he takes the story through the period of mergers of the previous student sports organisations and the creation of BUSA.

### Merger and the creation of BUSA

In the event it was the Government decision through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to abolish the "binary divide" that was to trigger the events that led to the unification of the student sports bodies. Polytechnics were now entitled to apply to the Privy Council for university status and to award their own degrees. Maintaining a divide between "old and new" universities was not an option. Whilst, as we have seen, there had been



previous moves towards merger, some of the other sporting bodies were suspicious of the intentions of the UAU not least because they could command the most resources<sup>1</sup>. It is possible that the merger would not have taken place, had the legislation not forced the pace and made the move inevitable<sup>2</sup>. There was, however, disagreement over how this might happen. There was not only a change of status to cope with, a number of the new

universities entered into negotiations with other colleges over merger. As a consequence, the membership of the BCSA began to decline, for example Crewe and Alsager College became a faculty of the new Manchester Metropolitan University, and, such was the haemorrhage, that Harry Mawdsley of the BCSA recognised that it was no longer viable to hold a separate college competition<sup>3</sup>. However, for the season

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Harry Mawdsley 12 May 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondence with Paul Slater, Life Vice President of BUSA and former Athletic Union Administrator at Southampton University and chair of the UAU. 17 April 2004.

<sup>3</sup> BUSA. Letter from Harry Mawdsley of BCSA to Dr. Alan Sharp. 15 October 1992.

1992-1993 a number of BPSA/BCSA members opted to join the UAU. Some joined under their "original" names, Oxford Polytechnic, for example, whilst others joined under their new names, Middlesex University being an example. These former Polytechnics were joined by Bedford College of HE, Cardiff Institute, Glamorgan University, the College of St. Mark and St. John, Sunderland University, Trinity and All Saints College and West London Institute of HE<sup>4</sup>. Facing the inevitable, both the BPSA and the BCSA voted to dissolve themselves, which took effect in 1993. It was not, however, a foregone conclusion. BPSA members were not entirely happy that their concerns had been adequately dealt with. At what was to be the final meeting of the BPSA, at the newly named Sheffield Hallam University, concerns were expressed about the status of part time students and the level of fee, per head, that was to be the fee paid to any new organisation, which was significantly more than they had paid to the BPSA. Furthermore, the presentation from the UAU representative had not been universally well received. The vote was on a knife edge and it was only when Newcastle and Leeds Polytechnics declared that, irrespective of any vote, they were going to join the new organisation that enough delegates voted to dissolve the BPSA. Guy Taylor, a former AU President at Newcastle Polytechnic and BPSA member, remembers that many of the Polytechnics felt that they were "looked down upon" by the UAU and BUSF members, and that their competitions had been seen as somehow second best. Some of the historical tensions, quite naturally, spilled over into the early years of BUSA, but, in some ways, both the Polytechnics and the Colleges had

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Many of the Polytechnics felt that they were "looked down upon" by the UAU and BUSF members and that their competitions had been seen as somehow second best.

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the last laugh. The first BUSA Rugby Final was contested by the former Newcastle Polytechnic and West London Institute (which had been a BCSA member) and not Loughborough, the more traditional finalists. In the same season (1992-1993) the Universities in Scotland agreed to join the new organisation<sup>5</sup>.

As if the merger negotiations were already difficult enough, there was also a general atmosphere of uncertainty in the student movement as a whole. An Education Bill was introduced by the Conservative Government that, amongst other things, sought to severely restrict the ability of students' unions to function, and proposed defining a series of "core" activities for which it would be legitimate to allocate funds. Non core activity, it was suggested, should be funded by personal donation and not university funds. Sport was not, initially, defined as a core activity for which the Education Secretary, John Patten, received considerable flack at a Cabinet Meeting,

according to NUS' information. All student organisations rose to the occasion and joined a highly professional campaign of lobbying led by the NUS President, Lorna Fitzsimons. By the time the Act was passed in 1994, the proposals had been considerably watered down. It was a significant victory, but had created considerable unease because of proposals to enforce cross campus ballots for any affiliation paid by any student organisation which would have included athletic unions and BUSA. There were also fears that there would be considerably less funding for student groups.

A crucial factor, in the eventual merger, was the agreement by the officers of the UAU and BUSF to work together; collectively they had the most financial clout and together were able to exert a strong influence on the outcome. Professor Alan Sharp recalls the meeting where they agreed to set aside any differences: "The officers met in a hotel just behind the British Museum, and I asked the UAU folk – are we going to do a deal? They said – Yes – that was it, once the UAU and BUSF worked together there wasn't really anywhere else for the others to go"<sup>6</sup>. In many ways it was seen by some as a fait accompli<sup>7</sup>. Above all, the officers trusted one another and refused to be driven apart when difficulties arose. The key players in the negotiations to follow were Stuart Wade, Alun Evans and David Eastwood, the BUSF Treasurer. Sharp recalls that Eastwood provided invaluable common sense advice and had overall sense of what needed to be done. Jim Brown also provided advice on some of the legal implications. The officers of the UAU and BUSF agreed that they would seek to merge both organisations by the 31 July 1994, a proposal that was put separately to

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence with Greg Jones 11 May 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Guy Taylor 1 June 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Correspondence with Professor Alan Sharp 21 May 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Harry Mawdsley.

each General Council, both meeting at Liverpool in March 1992. It was agreed that there would be a single programme of British universities sport for the year 1992-1993 season; the administrative burden being shared by the UAU office in London and BUSF in Birmingham<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, it was agreed that the new organisation, provisionally known as the British Universities Athletic Union (BUAU), should be open to all institutions of higher education. In 1993-1994 the UAU and BUSF produced a joint handbook, a symbolic publication that demonstrated their intention to merge<sup>9</sup>. During discussions on the mechanics of the merger, it was felt that it would be administratively easier to allow BUSF to "take over" the UAU and rename itself. The main recommendations of this approach were that it would provide a useful precedent for possible future mergers with other corporate members of BUSF, namely NISC, SUSF and the UWAW. Furthermore, BUSF had a trust fund which might complicate matters if a merger "went the other way", and the constitution of BUSF was seen to more closely reflect the proposed administrative structure of the successor organisation. Throughout, however, there was a "determination that, whatever the final political and constitutional outcome of the current debate, British student teams and competitors will be given the best administrative and financial support possible to enable them to compete effectively at the highest international level...<sup>10</sup>". Former BPSA members still felt that the UAU and BUSF failed to appreciate

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He also felt that the proposed new name, "British Universities Athletic Union" to be misleading given that it was intended to recruit all colleges of Higher Education.

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some of the problems they faced organising across split sites and, on occasions large geographical boundaries. The status of part time students was also an issue, indeed, at the first BPSA conference at Keele, the former BPSA members expressed concern that they were being asked to support a fee rise and include part time students as part of their fee calculation before any formal constitutional clause had been passed that allowed them to vote. The BPSA may have been viewed by some of the other student bodies as "too political", it served well on that day when they made a successful challenge to the proposal<sup>11</sup>. The CVCP, whose representative David Anderson-Evans sat on the UAU board, expressed their concerns over the status of the older collegiate universities, Oxford, Cambridge and London; he was keen to see a representative for these institutions on both the General Council and the Executive Committee of the new organisation. He

also felt that the proposed new name, "British Universities Athletic Union" to be misleading, given that it was intended to recruit all colleges of Higher Education<sup>12</sup>. There were also some problems over the "British" status of the new organisation. The English Universities Football Association were concerned that they would no longer be eligible for funding from the FA if they were to embrace a British wide organisation rather than one that operated purely in England<sup>13</sup>. Slight problems continued when the title British Universities Sports Association was settled upon. The British Universities Sailing Association, quite naturally, argued strongly against the new title and for a while contemplated legal action<sup>14</sup>.

There were delicate negotiations over the transfer of finance and other assets, which included trophies that had been donated by alumni of the BPSA and BCSA<sup>15</sup>. Graham Solley, a founding member of the BPSA, wrote to Dr. Alan Sharp to obtain reassurance that the contribution that the BPSA had made to student sport over the 23 years of its history, and that those holding life memberships of BPSA, automatically be recognised by the new organisation as well as concerns over differing levels of resources and split sites<sup>16</sup>. There was also a great deal of discussion on the location of the headquarters. The UAU had held offices at the University of London since 1927, and had been joined by BUSF when it was established in 1962. However, in 1989, the University had considerably increased the rent for the office space and

<sup>8</sup> BUSA. The Future of University and Higher Education Sport – Merger of UAU and BUSF 29 April 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Correspondence with Greg Jones 11 May 2004.

<sup>10</sup> BSSF: Submission Document for Sports Council Funding 1992–1995. Page 2

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Guy Taylor 1 June 2004.

<sup>12</sup> BUSA. Letter to P. Rhodes, General Secretary of BUSF from David Anderson – Evans CVCP 3 November 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Greg Jones, UAU Chief Executive from Steve Teasdale Chair of the English Universities Association Football sub committee 23 June 1993

<sup>14</sup> Correspondence with Paul Slater 25 May 2004

<sup>15</sup> BUSA: Papers for the merger of BUSF and UAU (1993)

<sup>16</sup> BUSA. Letter from Graham Solley, Head of Recreation, Sheffield City Polytechnic to Dr. Alan Sharp. 13 October 1992.

introduced a new clause to the lease that made the tenants liable for repairs; it was known that the University of London Estates department had concerns about the state, and safety, of the building and, upon reflection, it was felt that signing a new lease was too open ended, and uncertain a commitment<sup>17</sup>. In 1988, BUSF, therefore, decided to move out of London, arguing that it was increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff in London, that reasonable salaries could not be paid and, that by moving, larger premises could be secured<sup>18</sup>. Nottingham was the original venue discussed, in the event property was purchased in Birmingham, which were shared with the BCSA and the BPSA. The UAU did not want to move from London, so they relinquished Woburn Square and moved to rented offices in the Fruit Exchange. Given the discussions over potential merger, they felt it was more advisable to rent rather than buy.<sup>19</sup> However, it was agreed in April 1993 to locate the offices for the new organisation in London, as it was felt that there would be a greater continuity of staffing, greater visibility and better access to decision making bodies. New offices, in Union Street, were purchased in 1994 for £170,000 and opened by the HRH The Princess Royal. The Princess has been the Patron of BUSA since its inception and, throughout the past decade, she has played an active role, always prepared to attend BUSA events and to enhance both their profile and prestige.

All these difficulties, discussions and issues had to be dealt with whilst, at the same time, trying to organise an efficient fixtures

programme. But there was no doubt that the new organisation was "committed to, and uniquely capable of, maintaining and expanding the possibilities for sporting competition for its members, and to ensuring appropriate and successful participation by British Universities teams in international events<sup>20</sup>". Stuart Wade of the UAU was elected as the first Chair of BUSA; Dr. Alan Sharp of BUSF agreed to stand aside, because Wade was closer in age to the students, was based in England and, above all, brought a passion and commitment to the job that enabled him to take students with him. Sharp had done much to smooth the process of merger, had chaired the meetings and made sure that everyone felt they had had the opportunity to put their views forward. He was made a Senior Vice Chair of BUSA and Chaired the International Committee until the late nineties. He has also served for three terms as a Control Commissioner for FISU<sup>21</sup>. In reflecting on his time leading BUSF, Sharp felt he was "pleased to have had a part in keeping BUSF alive through difficult times, because BUSF had a lot to offer student sports organisation. It survived because of the commitment of Casey, Wenden, Brown and Eastwood with help from colleagues like Angela Wortley and Tony Lemons and a splendid set of General Secretaries, Mike Gee, Yuri Matischen and Peter Rhodes, but mostly because students listened to the arguments and made sensible decisions"<sup>22</sup>. The BUSF Constitution was used as the basis for the new body which helped to retain charitable status for the new organisation; "The objects of the

Association as set out in its constitution are to advance the education of young men and women engaged in full-time education in institutions of Higher Education. In furtherance of this aim, the Association seeks to develop sporting activities and organise championships between its members; it promotes United Kingdom representative championships, United Kingdom fixtures and tours at home and abroad, and British teams for events organised by the Federation Internationale du Sport Universitaire<sup>23</sup>" In his introduction to the first BUSA Annual Report (1994/1995) Stuart Wade, Chairman, wrote that student sport was "both the end of a long road and the beginning of a new one"<sup>24</sup>. BUSA's creation was celebrated at its first annual dinner, which was hosted by Southampton University.

There are many within BUSA today who pay tribute to the role that Stuart Wade played in bringing people together and helping the merger go through. Throughout his time as Chairman of the UAU, he demonstrated a total commitment to the creation of a single organisation for student sport in which there was a strong and effective student voice. His understanding of student needs and aspirations and his abilities as a persuasive speaker were crucial to the smooth running of the merger and numerous tributes are paid to the diplomatic way in which Wade handled what were, at times, delicate negotiations. His hard work and commitment ensured that BUSA quickly developed credibility with its members.

<sup>17</sup> Correspondence with Professor Alan Sharp

<sup>18</sup> BUSA. London and the Future paper by Stuart Wade and Dr. Alan Sharp.

<sup>19</sup> BUSA. British Universities Athletic Union - the future location of the administrative headquarters of British Student Sport

<sup>20</sup> BUSA: Forward Plan November 1995 to October 1998. Page 3.

<sup>21</sup> Correspondence with Professor Alan Sharp 21 May 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Correspondence with Professor Alan Sharp 21 May 2004.

<sup>23</sup> BUSA: Forward Plan November 1995 to October 1998. Page 4.

<sup>24</sup> BUSA. Annual Report 1994-1995

# Contributing to AGENDA

## 'Where would Agenda be without the diverse and challenging contributions of members?'

Recent developments in Agenda have received excellent feedback, and numerous contributors can take the credit for the success of the journal.

Agenda can only be as good as the articles it runs, and we would urge any reader with an idea to put pen to paper...

Perhaps you've just completed a new project and could offer some tips to others.

Maybe you feel strongly about one of our articles – whether you love it or hate it, tell us!

Perhaps you know something we don't – a useful web site for example.

Or perhaps you can spin a good yarn about a particular tricky moment in your union...

Whatever your ideas, Agenda is your forum.

For those of you who do want to put pen to paper, the following guidelines will help you structure your ideas...

## Reports or Feature?

Reports will be largely factual and will give readers a general overview of the subject matter.

Reports should be a maximum of 700 words.

Features will be analytical pieces which give in depth consideration to the subject matter, and will be a maximum of 2000 words.

## Adding Interest or Credibility

There are lots of techniques to help you add weight to your article:

### • Statistics

How many people are affected by your topic?

How have things changed over the last x years?

For statistical information, try relevant web sites, legal briefing documents, the AMSU Finance survey or the general media.

### • Quotes

Everyone likes to read what other people have to say and quotes add personality to articles. Quotes may be from colleagues, external figures or other publications or you may open with a particularly outrageous quote to argue against.

### • Theories or Models

Does your situation or argument support a particular model? Or, even better, does your piece challenge a well respected model?

### • Case Studies

Has this happened somewhere else? Was the outcome similar or totally different?

### • Recommended Further Reading

Where can readers go to get more information?

## • How will you add visual interest?

The Agenda design team do their best to supply graphics, but this is not always possible. The visual appeal of your article will affect how many people read it, and all contributors should make every effort to include at least one of the following :

- Your union logo
- A passport photograph of the group or activity you are writing about
- A diagram or graph
- A cartoon
- Copies of any promotional material that can be scanned

## Submitting Contributions

Before you submit your article, please:

- Check the word length
- Check that you have included a photograph of yourself plus any other graphics
- Check that you have included a personal biography

Please submit your article by email to a member of the Agenda Editorial Board along with a hard copy in case of any IT problems.

## What next?

Your article will be edited by a member of the Agenda Editorial Board. You will be given the opportunity to review the edited version but you must respond within 24 hours if you wish to make any amendments.

If you don't have time to write an article for agenda but can contribute ideas, please send an outline of your ideas to the Editor. The outline should include :

- The issue you would like to see covered
- The 'slant' of the article
- People who would be willing to be interviewed, or people who are particularly knowledgeable on this topic
- A brief case study

**For further information please contact the AMSU Office or a member of the Agenda Editorial Board.**



# Any Other Cheese & Biscuits

## The Accounts – The Alternative Guide for Office-Bearers

Elsewhere in this issue are some sensible questions that could be asked. The problem with this approach is that it assumes that;

- a) people have a basic understanding of accounts – which they don't (and it is no different on the University Court or the boardrooms around the world)
- b) they are interested – they aren't
- c) that they would understand the answers – (see a).

AOCB presents the following questions for you to use to fill out the time that needs to be spent discussing accounts and avoid that embarrassing silence because nobody can think of a question. (AOCB guarantees that all questions have been tried in real life.)

- What is miscellaneous expenditure?
- How many bananas were sold in the shop?
- Why is condom income down?
- Why is the cost of Sabbatical Salaries more than the Sabbaticals are paid?
- Does the 80p Vodka on a Friday night reduce the GP in the bar?
- Why is Entertainments over budget? (it always is)
- Why has the vehicle insurance gone up? (A good question if you know who was driving it when the accident happened and you don't like them – a great question if they are actually at the meeting and a "must ask" if it was the Treasurer. WARNING. Do not ask if you were driving.)
- What is the most popular dish sold in catering?
- Does the expenditure include any items that are Ultra Vires?
- Why has call box income been declining?
- Sometimes, in the silence that follows the request for questions on finances, you may be tempted to ask one of the following questions. RESIST THAT TEMPTATION AT ALL COSTS. You will wish you had not asked the question, well before the half way stage of the answer.
- How does depreciation work?
- What is Irrecoverable VAT?
- What is the difference between PPL and PRS?
- Could we manage with one less staff member in finance?

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