

CEO Update and Report

Since the last AGM, the organisation has seen a lot of change; from an interim CEO over the summer period, to the biggest increase in the block grant, and structural changes within the organisation. I started in my position as CEO on Monday 26 September 2022 and have since then been focussing on three key areas to strengthen the SU for its members:

1. Block Grant Submission

Traditionally, the block grant submission has been completed annually, with budgets also following this process. We have agreed with the Vice Chancellor that the organisation will move away from annual submissions and will provide a 5-year block grant request, providing an opportunity to think further ahead and plan for the next 5 years rather than the 1 year. This will support the financial forecasting of the SU and its aims in supporting students. The request focuses on supporting the university's strategic aims and vision, ensuring that the SU is continuing to build and grow stronger for its members, with the financial means to be able to do this. I have submitted our first ever 5-year block grant request and am expecting a response from the university in June with the outcome. Once we know what our block grant will be for the next 5 years, I will focus on the budget forecasting and planning for the remainder of this academic year, ready for the start of our next financial year in August.

2. Strategy: the next 5 years

In conjunction with the block grant submission, I have been working hard on formulating a 5-year strategy for the SU, setting the organisation up for a concrete and identifiable vision and plan for its next steps of growth. The last strategy ended in 2020, and due to factors, such as the pandemic and the changes to the organisation, there has not been a new vision since. This will be fundamental in the growth of the SU and will provide a key vision and goal for the organisation. It will also demonstrate the commitment to members and what students in 2023 need from their SU and their higher education experience. The strategy will also be treated as a living document where the themes will run through the 5-year period but the aims and objectives will change according to student needs and to support our officers. There are 3 main themes which will encompass what this SU is about, all of which has been carefully chosen by taking in feedback from our current students (through campaigns such as the cost of living, and student views) along with themes for student needs across the sector in the UK. The themes have also been chosen based on best practices across Europe, most notably, Scandinavia. I am hoping to deliver and launch this strategy in August ahead of the new academic year and look forward to seeing how it support the students and the organisation in its development and growth.

3. Turnaround and Board of Trustees

Upon starting, it was clear that the organisation needed support across the whole structure. This included the Board of Trustees. In October, I proposed we go into a period of turnaround, whereby we recruit external members with key expertise and specialism that the SU needs to succeed in its development, and our current board members fold into this. We agreed that there are some key areas we needed such support and they are:

- HR (Rob Drury)
- Finance (Craig Osben)
- SU specialism (Sam Harris and Bill Yuksel)

- Charity/Governance (Nick Smith)
- Chair of Turnaround (Louise Ward)

I am very honoured to say that Board recruited an incredible group of individuals with some of the most experience in SU support and development within the sector who I have already seen the benefit of having as part of this period. I look forward to continuing to work with them and seeing how they support the SU in this exciting phase.

Rob Drury has vast experience within HE and SUs having worked at the University of East Anglia and the SU there. He is also an accredited HR consultant and is currently working at Halpin.

Craig Osben is an accredited accountant and auditor, and has worked at various accountancy agencies and is currently at M and A Partners as their Audit Assistant Manager.

Sam Harris is the Deputy Director of NUS Charity and has vast experience of supporting SU development across the UK along with supporting senior leadership within these organisations.

Bill Yuksel is the Managing Consultant at Peridot Partners, focusing on delivering equitable recruitment campaigns and has successfully recruited senior leaders within the SU movement during his time at Peridot.

Nick Smith is an Education and Charity Consultant and Trainer who specialises in governance within charities. He has worked with various SUs to support their governance during the development phase.

Louise Ward has worked within HE, and has experience of equitable practices within education. She is currently the Head of Operations at the University of Arts London and has worked at SOAS prior to this.

During my 8 months in post, I have very much focussed on the foundational areas of the organisation, rebuilding from the ground up ahead of the launch of the strategy. I am very proud of the growth we have already seen, the commitment from our career staff in serving students and the people within our community, and the dedication from our elected officials who are getting more involved politically, shaping what their university experience should be. We have a way to go, but in the time I have been here, I have seen incredible achievements and hitting key milestones. I know we will continue to do this.

Finally, I want to recognise the collective power of our students. We have come back stronger during difficult times. The pandemic, government changes and bills, and the cost of living crisis have caused unprecedented times for students within higher education, but our students have demonstrated the power in a collective. The cost of living campaign saw students leading on events such as the weekly dinner clubs and letting peers know about access to food banks, our officers have successfully launched campaigns such as free period products across campus for students and staff, and finally, seeing over 300 nominations from students for another on their successes across the year.

Thank you for making this job worthwhile and a job that I feel honoured to be doing. You are the reason I chose to be at this SU and I am so proud of what I have seen thus far. I look forward to seeing more in the near future.