

The University of York **Students' Union**

# Impact Report

2022 – 23



# Contents

Some words from CEO, Ben Vulliamy	<b>03</b>
Some standout stats	<b>05</b>
Welcoming new students	<b>06</b>
A welcome in numbers	<b>08</b>
Let's compare	<b>10</b>
Giving students a boost	<b>12</b>
Cost of living	<b>13</b>
Campaign wins	<b>14</b>
Roses are red	<b>16</b>
Commercial Services	<b>20</b>
Community	<b>21</b>
The Student Voice	<b>25</b>
Awards	<b>28</b>
Sustainability	<b>31</b>
Events	<b>36</b>
Behind the scenes	<b>41</b>
Advice & Support	<b>42</b>
Things we started	<b>44</b>
Finances	<b>48</b>
Learning & Growing	<b>50</b>
Conclusion	<b>51</b>

# Some words from CEO, **Ben Vulliamy**



2022/23 was the first full year post covid, when students could start to emerge from a period of huge disruption and change and try to experience a full student life and experience. To emerge from that into a cost of living crisis and a period of continued geo-political change will seem deeply unfair for a generation who seem to have to endure continual hardship and disruption of one form or another. A focus of our work in the union over the year was to try to bring some calm and continuity, to offset the effects of rocketing inflation on the most affected and to try to bring our students together in a world that seemed to be driving wedges between communities

2022/23 was the first full year post covid, when students could start to emerge from a period of huge disruption and change and try to experience a full student life and experience. To emerge from that into a cost of living crisis and a period of continued geo-political change will seem deeply unfair for a generation who seem to have to endure continual hardship and disruption of one form or another. A focus

of our work in the union over the year was to try to bring some calm and continuity, to offset the effects of rocketing inflation on the most affected and to try to bring our students together in a world that seemed to be driving wedges between communities.

In a year where the UK had 3 prime ministers, YUSU managed to create a bit

more stability with just one President. As supermarket food prices soared, we offered 40p hot meals in our venues. As opportunities became an expendable expense in a cost of living crisis, we distributed over £35,000 in access grants, helping students into sports, societies and volunteering. As licensed trade, hospitality and events on the high street felt the pressure of the economy we reopened our multiple venues, offered discounted tickets to events, and free events. As fuel prices climbed we negotiated household energy grants for students with the university. As student rent premiums continued to escalate we helped protect a proportion of £99 rooms on campus and lobby for affordable housing to be built into development plans.

Doing our best to make a real difference to students' lives is part of our role as a charity and union. We are proud of our ability to respond to the world around us, of our endeavour to protect the most vulnerable, and to influence those in positions of power and authority. We must balance those student needs against the organisation's needs, and this has been increasingly difficult. It's a year where we had to invest more into our workforce than ever, when we had to lean on our wellbeing and support infrastructure – not just for our students but for our own staff,

trustees, officers and volunteers. It's a year when we have operated at a deficit as we challenged ourselves to support students and staff. We will need to consider carefully how we stop the further deterioration of our modest reserves to avoid jeopardising the future of the union for future students.

We do have reasons to be optimistic. We continue to be a better-than-fair employer of students and permanent career staff. Trade across venues and events is improving and participation in our activities and services is diversifying.

As always, we must thank all those who make our work possible: Our officers and staff; our trustees and management; the thousands of student volunteers who liberate, campaign, represent, fundraise, organise, perform and compete; the funders and friends who support us. YUSU is always at its best when it brings together the sum of its parts with common purpose and values. Thanks for celebrating our combined impact with us.

**Ben Vulliamy**

# Some standout stats



£1,200

of direct investment into sustainability  
projects across campus



£34,800

in Activities Access Grants

# Welcoming new students

Welcome, or Freshers', is a pivotal time in the academic year – how we welcome new students can set the tone for the rest of their year. Alongside the colleges, we are responsible for hosting all official University of York Welcome events for new students, which gives us the chance to reflect and build bigger and better.

For Welcome 2022, we particularly wanted to engage postgraduate and international students – groups who might traditionally engage less with our Welcome offering – to ensure that everyone had equal opportunity to find their community and access our services, events, and activities.

## Comedy Night

By collaborating more closely with Colleges, we were able to make Comedy Night free for all first-year undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students.



# 600

### Students in attendance

nearly 40% of attendees were international students!

# 83.2%

### Satisfaction rate!\*

\*First Impressions 2022 feedback



# 4,000

## Tote bags

Our new branded tote bags were a huge success at Freshers' Fair – we gave out 4,000 in one day!



## Access All Areas

We hosted Access All Areas in collaboration with the colleges, an event which invited students to explore all of our venues with access to deals across the night to see which venues they liked best! Students said that this event helped them to make friends outside of their flat, as well as across other colleges.

### Emails

We sent tailored emails to PG students and we also attended the Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Fair for the first time in years, helping to create more connection between ourselves, the GSA, and postgraduate students.

We translated pre-arrival emails into Mandarin and Cantonese, helping students who speak English as a second language to feel more included in Welcome activities.



# A welcome in numbers

10,000

Followers on Instagram – helping to raise awareness of YUSU and create connection with our students

3,000

Memberships were purchased on the day of Freshers' Fair alone!

1,996

Viking Raid tickets sold

933

College x YUSU  
Bundle Tickets sold

1,249

Returners' Night  
tickets sold

300

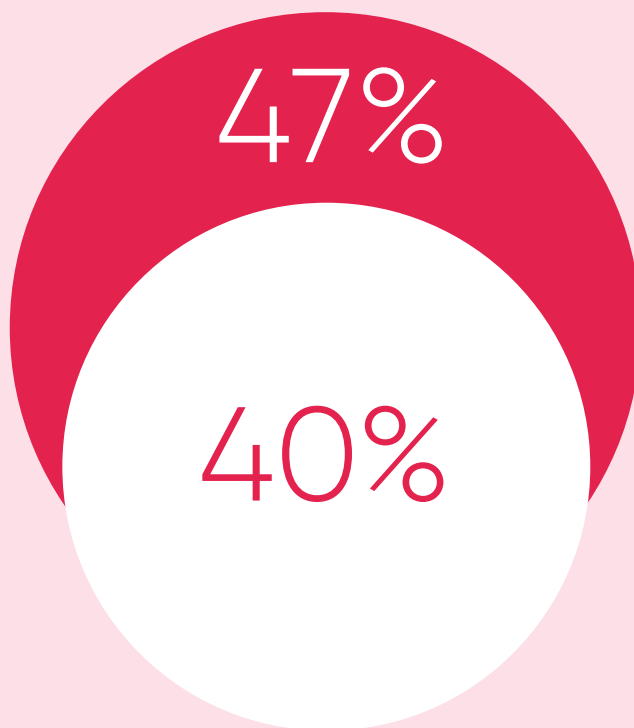
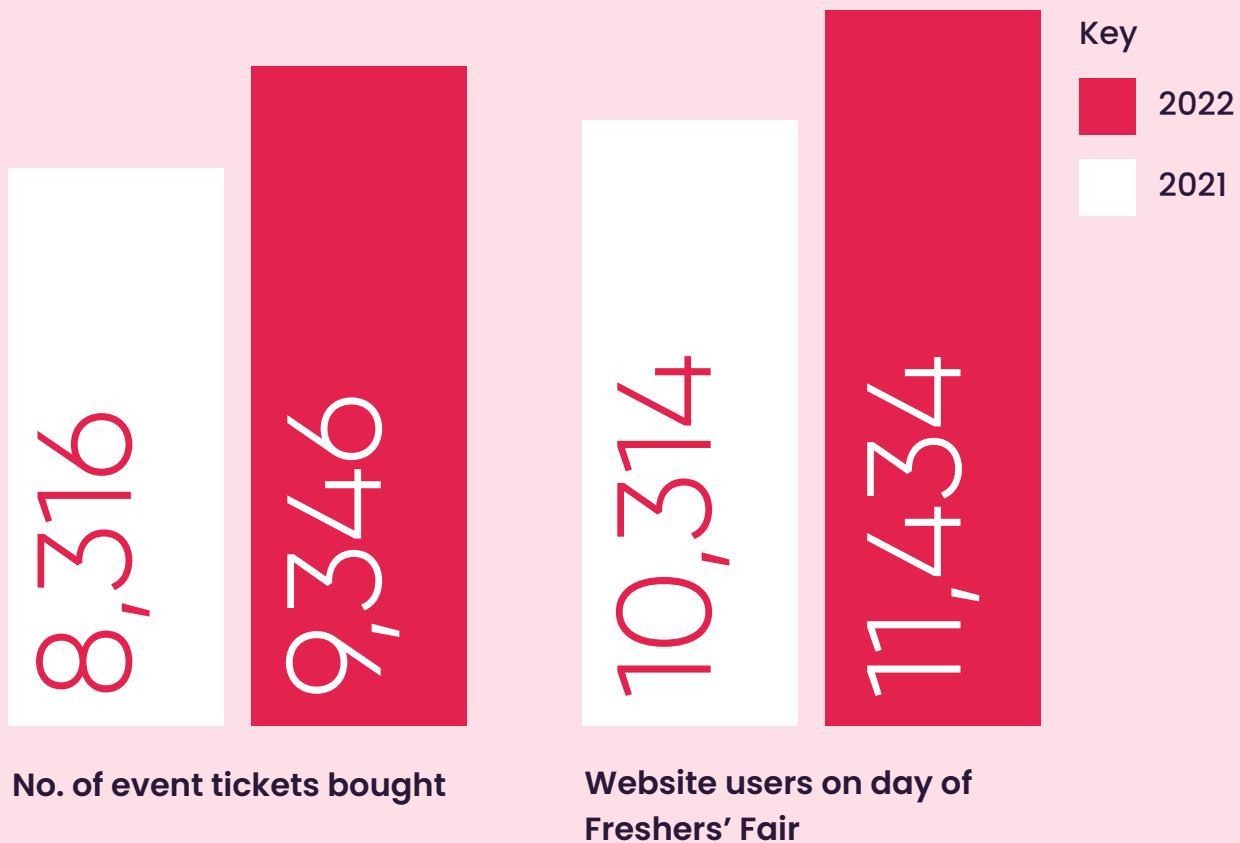
New TikTok followers

19,500+

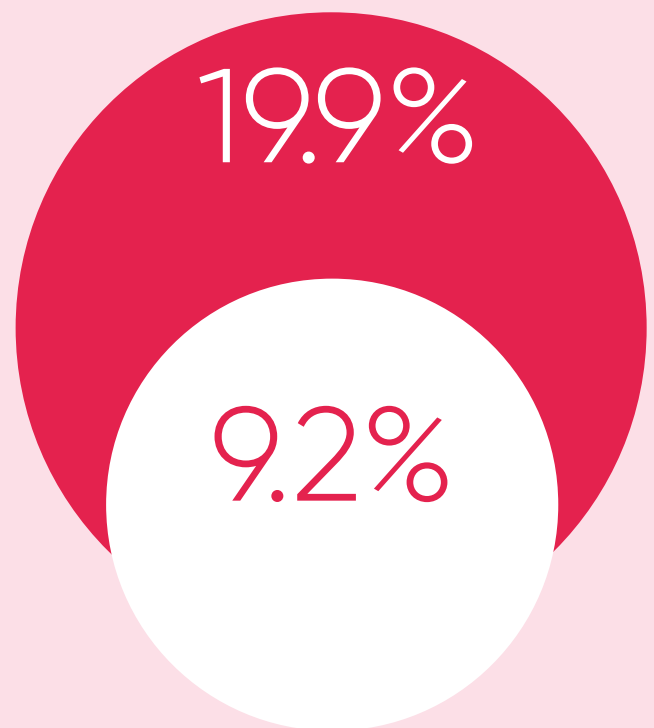
Memberships purchased for student groups across the Welcome period by 9900+ individual students



# Let's compare...



% of all new students who bought an event ticket



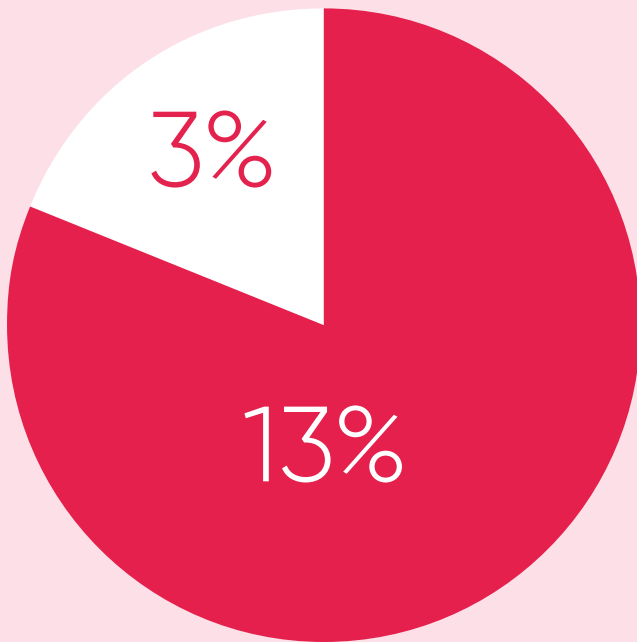
Of those who bought a ticket or membership, % of those sales were made by PG students

# Let's compare...

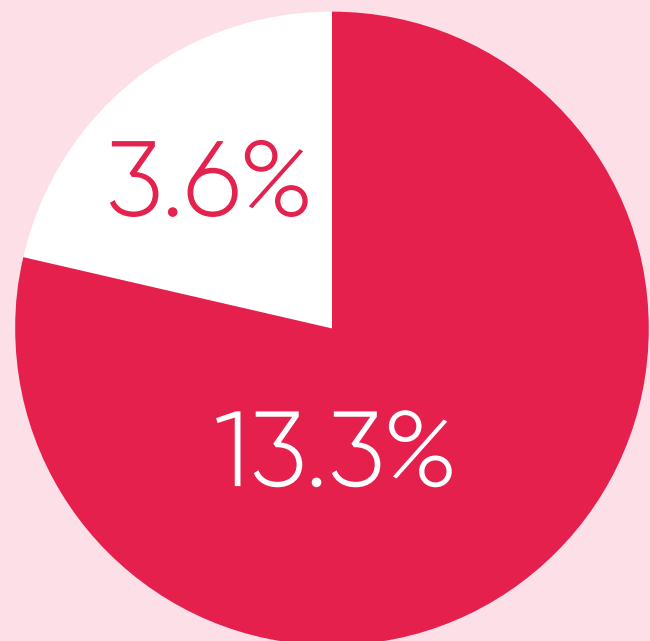
Key

2022

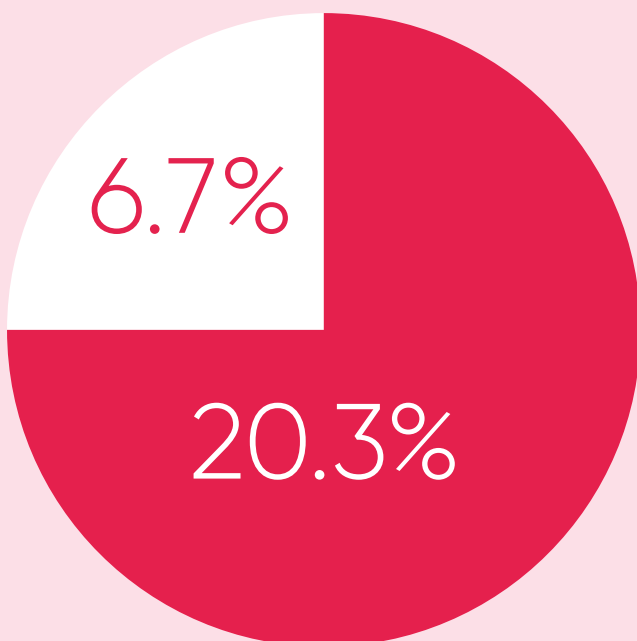
2021



Of those who bought a Freshers' ticket, % of those sales were made by PG students



% of Chinese PG students who bought a Freshers' ticket



% of international PGs who bought a membership or event ticket

“Comedy Night was a great event that made my first few days at UoY special”

# Giving students a boost

## Activities Access Grant – **thank you YuFund!**

The Activities Access Grant is a fund that YUSU has been offering for a few years now. It supports students to get involved in student group activities by reimbursing the membership and participation costs associated with both joining groups and taking part in their day-to-day activity.

In the 2022/23 academic year, **we supported 460 individual students** with a whopping **£34,800+!** As a result, students have been able to get stuck into university life without worrying about the financial impact.

“Without the grant, I wouldn’t feel like I was part of anything”

## Football for all!

**We secured £5000 of funding** from BUCS and the FA to run a brand new football project on campus to increase engagement with underrepresented groups on campus – we wanted to broaden the reach of football at the university and attract those who hadn't played before!

With this funding, we employed a student Football Development Officer, who we upskilled through the FA Playmakers Course. As a result, we ran weekly 'turn up and play' sessions and a 5-a-side social league, which **attracted 179 individual participants** over the year!

## Partnership Power!

As part of this project, we were also able to facilitate a new partnership with York City FC Foundation, which supported our Development Officer and ran a football coaching workshop for student leaders.

[Check out the video](#)



# Cost of Living

The Cost of Living crisis hit students hard, so we set about doing all we could to make things easier. We hired a student Cost of Living Assistant who helped put

together a dedicated [Cost of Living Resources Hub](#) on our website, full of tips and information on navigating through the crisis, from budget travel to free supplies on campus.



## Fruit & Root

Our Fruit & Root initiative aimed to ease the burden of eating healthily across exam season, without worrying about the financial impact of a healthy diet. The free bags consisted of fruit, veg and dried goods (like pasta!).

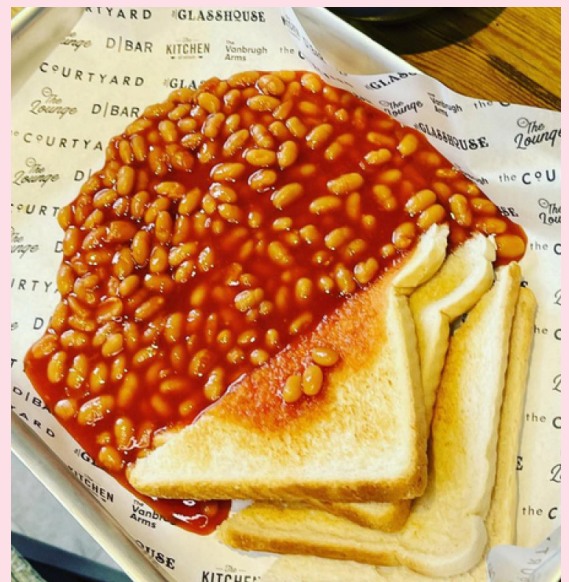
**463** collected bags!



## 40p meals

In recognition of the financial challenges that students have been facing, our commercial services team worked hard to provide students with affordable food. Our groundbreaking initiative, offering hot meals like beans on toast, potatoes, and soup for a mere 40p each has enabled students to access three hot meals a day at an astonishingly low cost.

To date, we have served an impressive **2,604 meals** through this initiative, significantly easing the financial burden on our students.



# Campaign Wins

## Ecosia on Campus

In January, two amazing students submitted an idea to the YUSU Policy Process: to change the default search engine on all classroom PCs from Google to Ecosia. Ecosia works just like Google, but all of their advertising revenue goes towards reforestation and afforestation projects. YUSU President Pierrick then fast-tracked the idea and got the University's IT team on board to put it in place.

A great example of **YUSU and students working in partnership** to bring about positive change.

## Sustainable periods

For the long-term development of our period poverty scheme, a top priority for YUSU was to create a more sustainable future for the project, both in keeping the project on campus long-term and making the project more environmentally friendly.

That's where Grace and Green come in – the 2022/2023 provider for our period poverty scheme! They provide free sustainable and ethical period care for all, as well as literacy education on periods and period poverty. Their products are biodegradable and come in recyclable packaging, which is a huge step towards a more sustainable future for the project!

The new **Grace & Green machines** were installed across campus in June 2023, ready for the new academic year.





## The largest single-action campaign in YUSU history

This academic year saw universities nationwide reverse key academic welfare provisions installed during the pandemic. These proposed changes would disproportionately affect our disabled students, students who menstruate, and those on lower incomes. YUSU was one of few unions to fight back – and the only one to win. In under 48 hours, Union Officers **mobilised over 1,850 students** sending 21,150 individual letters to academic leaders asking for self-certification provisions to be reinstated. The University responded with more than we bargained for and profoundly changed how our Exceptional Circumstances and Student Support Plans work, making our academic welfare provisions some of the most generous in the country.



Deb Debayan, YUSU Academic Officer, and Pierrick Roger, YUSU President, photographed celebrating this huge campaign win!



# Roses are red (for now)

Roses is an incredible annual sporting varsity between the University of York and Lancaster University – a centuries-old historic rivalry battling it out on the field to take home the James Carter Cup! Each year, we take turns to host the fixtures, website, and the thousands of competitors and spectators. And this year, it was our turn! While we didn't take home this year's James Carter Cup, we worked with students to host an incredible event and raised a huge amount for charity.



**140+**  
fixtures throughout the  
weekend



## The games

The Boat Races kicked off the weekend in the heart of the city! Replicating the first ever Roses in 1965 and celebrating the University in its 60th anniversary year.

A mens' and womens lacrosse match took centre stage at our Roses Opening Ceremony, which drew one of the highest numbers of spectators at a UK student Lacrosse match – **a crowd of 1000 people!**

We closed out the weekend with women's and men's basketball – and York won both! So we ended the weekend on a high.



Across the weekend, we welcomed a whopping **6,000+ spectators!**

## Shining a light on sexual violence

Roses isn't just about sports; it's also about community. A huge part of the tournament is creating and strengthening links with our local communities and raising money and awareness for important causes. This year, York Sport Union President Franki Riley and the York Sport Union committee chose to partner with local York-based charity Survive.

As part of the campaign, Franki (York Sport Union President) reached out to students to ask if they would anonymously share uplifting messages to those who had been affected by sexual violence. The messages were written on a piece of art created by a student, which could only be viewed with a UV light, meaning people could choose whether or not they wanted to interact with it, given its sensitive nature.



## Roses everywhere!



### Partnership Power – **Volunteers**

Roses couldn't go ahead without the incredible work of our student volunteers. We recruited **over 50 student volunteers** to support the delivery of key fixtures across the weekend.



### Partnership Power – **Coverage**

Another integral part of Roses is our wonderful student media groups, who provide coverage for the whole event. **We supported a team of over 200 student media volunteers** to provide the most comprehensive event coverage yet!

We partnered with ElbowSpace to deliver our incredible Roses website.

# 35,000+

visitors to the website

# 4,400

views on the catchup page

# 2,500

views on the map page

# 1,450

live blogs posted onto the website

# 70+

streams hosted by Student Media

All of this went off without a hitch and enabled students – home, visiting, groups, and spectators alike – to interact with Roses in multiple ways, from checking the scores to catching up on a fixture.

# Commercial Services

Our Commercial Services team work hard to provide safe spaces for students to enjoy, from serving food and drinks, to hosting events and sports viewings, and enabling students to use the spaces for their own events. We have 6 fantastic venues on campus, so there is a space for everyone!

## Elevating Standards with Best Bar None Accreditation

Our relentless pursuit of safety and excellence in alcohol service resonates deeply with the Best Bar None accreditation. This esteemed programme, endorsed by industry giants such as

Stonegate, Wetherspoons, and Greene King, and supported by the Home Office, scrutinises businesses across four crucial areas:

- **Venue Management:** Diligent assessment and implementation of security measures, noise control, and litter management procedures.
- **Staff Training and Care:** Emphasis on staff support, professional development, and wellbeing.
- **Customer Safety and Welfare:** A steadfast commitment to ensuring the safety of our patrons, including stringent age verification to prevent underage alcohol sales.
- **Customer Service and Community:** YUSU Commercial Services consistently fosters a welcoming atmosphere for customers and actively participates in community engagement.

We are thrilled to announce that YUSU Commercial Services has achieved the **PRESTIGIOUS GOLD AWARD FROM BEST BAR NONE**, securing an impressive **97% pass mark**. Notably, our Commercial Services ranks as the second-highest scoring students' union in this programme!



# Community

Our Communities team works with students to improve the world around them, from volunteering in the local community to fundraising.

**In the 2022/2023 academic year, there were...**



## Fundraising

**£148,471**

was raised by student fundraisers through RAG (raising and giving), clubs, societies, volunteering projects and colleges.

This will benefit 55 local, national and international charities and community causes.

**£37,181.46**

raised for Movember – taking our lifetime total to over £160,000!

**£15,000+**

was raised for Survive as part of the Shine a Light on Sexual Violence campaign across Roses.

## Local community: a closer look at our projects

### A cuppa and a chat

Tea and Coffee Club run weekly tea and coffee sessions that connect students and local elderly residents, creating intergenerational bonds and aim to combat loneliness in the local community.

#### We asked the volunteers:

What is your proudest achievement from being involved in and leading your volunteering project this year?

#### Here's what they said:

"Helping to provide a safe space where a variety of different people, both elderly and students, can come together and interact in the local community. As well as seeing the project grow and be exposed to new people, meeting those new people (both elderly and volunteers) and seeing how much of a difference we are making to their lives be it only for a few hours each week."





## Fighting hunger

All Should Eat works with local food banks to collect food from campus and raise awareness around food poverty and insecurity in York. This year, the group has collaborated with a number of other YUSU student groups and external charities, such as their collaboration with the Feminist Society on a Period Poverty campaign, as well as collaborations to raise funds for local food banks through a ball and a charity pantomime. The group regularly sets up stalls on campus to collect donations for current and new food initiatives, such as Door 84, Tang Hall Community Centre and New Earswick Helping Hands.

### The 2022/2023 Project Coordinator said:

"Running and being involved in a volunteering project has been the highlight of my university experience. I am personally hoping to work for a charity doing very similar things, and All Should Eat has provided me with incredible experience to do so. This year I have encouraged a focus on accessibility, accumulating to an external speaker event from York Disability Rights Forum focusing on Disabled People and Food Poverty. Since being involved, we have gone from 3 donation boxes to 9, and the entire committee has worked incredibly hard to make the project what it is and it has been wonderful growing the project and being able to see how generous the community at the University of York has been."



## Looking out for students

NightSafe provides immediate support and signposting to vulnerable students on YUSU club nights, as well as various special events throughout the year. NightSafe volunteers work in groups of three and patrol the city centre, working with venue managers, security staff and the emergency services, assisting the student with physical and mental health first aid.

### The 2022/2023 Project Coordinator discusses the focus of the project over the past year:

"The proudest NightSafe moment this year was definitely the successful training week we ran, incorporating a proper Mental Health First Aid course for the first time, and running a proper full-contact conflict management and resolution training for the first time since before COVID. It took a long time and a lot of money to be organised, but it was all worth it, as despite being the least numerous compared to other years, our volunteers were the most well-trained!"



# The Student Voice

## Elections: **inclusivity**

Elections are an essential part of YUSU's annual calendar – it's when the student population comes out to vote for the next year's Sabbatical Officer team and Part-Time Officer teams.

We sought to match the University's population demographics when it came to candidate nominations, meaning we wanted:

# 57%+

of candidates to identify as women or non-binary

# 33%+

of candidates are not white

# 31%+

of candidates are international students

# 17%+

of candidates identify as having a disability



We met **all areas** of representation but one.

We didn't meet our goal of 17%+ of candidates identify as having a disability. And so we are looking at how we can offer more personalised individual candidate support going forward, to help those students identifying as having a disability to feel that running an Elections campaign is something they are comfortable doing and that they are supported by our team.

## A snapshot of our candidates

We saw a more diverse turnout, with **61.4% of candidates identifying as not white**. Two of the five candidates who were elected are international students, four are women, and three are people of colour. **54% of the newly elected Part-Time Officers identify as non-binary or gender nonconforming.**

We are thrilled to say that the 2022/23 Sabbatical officer team represents **one of the most diverse Sabbatical teams we have had elected** in YUSU's history

## Elections: breaking down barriers

It is hard studying for a degree and running an Elections campaign at the same time. But every year, we want all students to feel that they can do both.

- We secured assessment extensions for any candidate who was running in the elections, so no one felt that their education would suffer
- We provided resources and free workshops for all candidates to ensure everyone had access to the same support
- We reimbursed candidates for materials used in their elections and had a limit on how much candidates were able to spend on materials so that no one was priced out of running a campaign

## Working in partnership: Student Research scheme

We wanted to understand more about students' lived experiences and what they wanted from us – particularly those groups with traditionally marginalised voices. There are examples across the sector of 'students as researchers', but these tend to have more strictly defined parameters, as the students apply to work on an established research project or a new piece that has been commissioned by their institution or union.

## We wanted to **empower students.**

And so our scheme gave students the freedom to define the initial scope of the research and how we could help them. Instead of applying to help on a project, we asked that applicants submit a 500-word proposal outlining what they would like to research and how that would benefit their community.



# Awards

Every year, YUSU hosts a series of award ceremonies to celebrate students and their achievements:

Colours Ball

Love York Awards

College Sport Awards

Student Media Awards

Activities Awards

Excellence Awards

LOVE  
YORK  
AWARDS



THE  
**EXCELLENCE**  
AWARDS 2023



Here are some of the nominations that our students received, showing the huge impact they have on life here at York.

### **Craft Society**

nominated for Student Group of the Year

**Love York Awards**

**"Crafts Society has a great team ethos regarding accessibility, inclusion, and diversity.** The society has two rooms: a chatty room and a quiet room. The quiet room is particularly popular amongst neurodivergent members who have sensory requirements. They also host free sessions every term as part of their dedication to financial accessibility, ensuring that anyone can participate regardless of their financial situation."

### **Dance Society Spring Showcase**

nominated for Event of the Year

**Love York Awards**

"The dance society spring showcase included over 400 members and **allowed a opportunity for students of all skill level and ability to take part and show what they have been learning this term.** The event was so fun and well organised considering the amount of people who were involved."



**Kyle Siwek**

nominated for Contribution to Student Life

**Love York Awards**

"The influence that Kyle has had on so many students is incomprehensible... he's stood up for injustice for all students, given hundreds of students the opportunity to play sport (creating the rounders team in first year as a way to give students a break from exam stress in summer term) and have an outlet from university life, he's updated constitutions so students of the future won't face injustices, he's volunteered at countless university events (being a head volunteer at Roses most recently), he's run events that have pulled students together... he's given the opportunity for charities to have their stories heard and has contributed to countless charitable causes while doing so. **A lot of the work Kyle has done at university has been behind the scenes, but a lot of students' university experiences would not have been the same without him... He's been an unsung hero the entire time he's been here and he most definitely deserves the recognition now.**"

# Sustainability



We were awarded **Excellent** for **Green Impact Students' Unions 2022/2023!**

## Our auditor said...

"YUSU have taken a holistic approach to sustainability, including a strong focus on social sustainability. This is a huge strength and something which should be commended, but the submission should still continue to highlight the positive outcomes for environmental sustainability alongside work in other areas. **Much of YUSU's work has been led or informed by students and it's fantastic to see how strong the student voice is in everything they do. The work has been strengthened by a dedicated sustainability role which is ultimately going to lead to students feeling better represented and supported when it comes to sustainability.** It is clear that the team care deeply about this work and how it impacts their students, with a very compassionate approach taken."

## Sustainability Development Grant

The Sustainable Development Grant was set up in October 2022, and it uses the UN's Sustainable Development Goals as criteria to allocate funding for grassroots sustainability projects on campus.

There were six successful grant applications up and running in the 2022/23 academic year, amounting to **£1,200 of direct investment into sustainability action across campus!** We've seen a healthy mix of both staff and students applying to the grant and a wide range of themes across the projects.

We have several smaller-scale grants that are being used to purchase the tools and materials required to set up new growing spaces on campus, such as the Executive Operations department setting up their own staff-run allotment, and the Health Sciences department starting a herb garden (both to benefit the wellbeing of staff during breaks and to grow medicinal herbs which could be utilised in their teaching!) Participants have reported a healthy crop of tomatoes, beans, and potatoes this year.

We also have a few larger projects with more awareness-raising focus, such as the development of a Climate Action Game– to help York students engage with different methods of climate action, and to build confidence in trying out those actions for themselves in their own lives. The Sustainable Development Grant has helped fund the development of this game, which the project lead hopes to make available for students to use in their college common rooms over the upcoming academic year!

## Coming up Roses

Every year, Roses sees a huge number of students visiting campus – that means a huge number of visitors to our venues, a huge number of takeaway items, and therefore a huge amount of waste. This year, we wanted to do things a bit differently.

And so we introduced the Roses Cup, making significant strides in reducing single-use plastic consumption. Customers put down a deposit for the cup when they bought their drink; if they returned the cup, they could either get their money back or donate it to our partner charity, Survive.

This initiative raised an **impressive £2,035.74** for the charity.



This initiative directly contributed towards eradicating single-use plastic from our venues!

## Bottle Up

In collaboration with the University, we successfully eliminated glass and plastic bottled water from campus, replacing them with spring water in reusable bottles made from sugar cane.

We worked with the University to provide **4,000 free bottles** to freshers and encourage students to embrace reusable alternatives, promoting sustainable habits that will last a lifetime.



## A greener office

As a busy organisation with a large office space, office supplies are in great demand! In the past, Amazon has been a go-to for those needs. We are trying however to move away from relying on bigger corporations and so have set up a new account with a more local and greener office supplier to move closer towards that goal.

## Waste not want not

It's another win for Commercial Services!

Through rigorous internal auditing, YUSU Commercial Services achieved **REMARKABLE REDUCTIONS IN TERM 3 OF...**

43%

in kitchen waste

18%

in guest waste

11%

in liquid waste

This translates to **A REDUCTION OF.....**

293.88 Kg

in solid waste

20.34 Kg

in liquid waste



# Events: **Connecting with students**

## **International Christmas Event**

It might be the most wonderful time of year for some, but for many students, Christmas can be a lonely time – particularly for international students, who might be far away from loved ones. And so in December, our Student Voice team hosted a free social specifically for international students who were staying on campus across the Christmas holidays.



**Over 300** students attended!



## An international welcome to the City of York

In 2022, we ran our first ever 'Welcome to York' civic welcome event. **160 international students were invited** to attend the event at the York Guildhall. We bussed the students to and from campus into the city centre, where we welcomed them to the city of York. The Lord Mayor and Professor Kiran Trehan formally welcomed them to the city and talked about how the city of York should be a city that welcomes people from across the world to enjoy everything it offers – and students are an important part of that.

The event included zones run by students, where new international students could learn about self-guided history tours of York, where to eat and try out a range of international cuisine, an interactive map to share where students had travelled from and see how connected we are to the world around us, a range of GSA trip registration opportunities, and more. Giveaways included Yorkshire tea, Tunnocks tea cakes, city maps, and independent shopping vouchers.

**100% of attendees** said that they 'learned more about the City of York as a result of attending the event'.



## Welcome Week A-cake-demics

‘A-cake-demics’ are YUSU-led events that bring departmental staff and students together and encourage them to have conversations with each other, strengthening the sense of community within each department! During Welcome we went across 13 departments, giving away coffee and cake and getting to over 100 new students!

## YUSU on the Move

YUSU on the Move is a way for us to talk to students in person and to understand how they’re feeling – a pulse check. In the 2022/23 academic year, the Voice team used different locations based on student footfall. Setting up in the JB Morrell Library meant reaching a lot of students, and understanding their moods and feelings through a ‘How are you feeling?’ board and enabling the team to get an insight into current issues affecting students.





## Ukrainian Student Society event

The Ukrainian Student Society wanted to mark the 1-year anniversary of the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. They wanted to host their event in the city, bringing together friends and communities affected by war, at The Guildhall to share the stories of refugees, hear from Karazin Kharkiv University with whom the University of York are twinned, and hear from academics about the effects.

The committee had arranged for presentations from Denys Ganzha, who was part of the Youth Affairs Council in the Ukrainian Presidential Office and from Callum McDonald, broadcaster and journalist, about his experience of war reporting. With over 200 student and community guests, the event showed the strength of the community of all those affected by war and that York is a place that should offer sanctuary and safety for those who need it.



## Holi

A remarkable first for us, YUSU organised a subsidised event celebrating Holi, the Festival of Colors, in collaboration with the Hindu Society. This non-alcoholic event brought together hundreds of students to revel in the vibrant festivities while promoting cultural diversity.



## The World Cup: more than just football

During the World Cup, our CS team provided safe and inclusive venues for students to support their favourite teams. But alongside this, we also wanted to create a supportive environment for LGBTQ+ groups who didn't want to take part. And so The Kitchen (our non-alcohol venue) and The Vanbrugh Arms were

established as football-free spaces. For those who did want to view/engage with the World Cup, **we donated £400** to the liberation groups so they could exclusively hold an area in D bar to watch the games, working with them to highlight messaging around the human rights issues surrounding the World Cup.

# Behind **the scenes**

## At a glance

Our Digital team works hard year-round to ensure that both the day-to-day workings of the Union and the big things, like Elections and Roses, run smoothly.



# 10,000

reduction in accessibility issues from 14,000 to 4,000 on our website

# 1,043

incoming tickets to the IT support desk – 99% success rate of resolving these issues within our Service Level Agreement timeframe.

# 4.8/5 ★

customer satisfaction rating for our IT support services

## Organisation is key

In 2022/23, we invested a lot in software for our staff; programmes and software such as Freshdesk, Asana, and Canva allow more freedom, flexibility and organisation capability across teams. The introduction of Freshdesk has meant that the student experience of contacting YUSU is a lot easier and over the year we have received **over 13,000 tickets** to the various inboxes!

# Advice & Support: a helping hand for students

Our Advice and Support Centre (ASC) provides independent and confidential advice and guidance to students on a range of academic, personal and wellbeing issues. This year, they have faced particular challenges as a result of the Marking and Assessment Boycott and an increasing number of cases involving suspected use of generative AI, which is a relatively new area of academic misconduct so policies and

guidance around this issue remain a work in progress. In spite of new challenges, response times for cases have remained within the advertised 3 working days for most cases and more than 90% of respondents to the ASC anonymous feedback survey indicated both that the information and guidance they received helped them with their academic or personal situation and that they would recommend the service to a friend.

## 587+

new advice cases

The most common case types are:

- Academic appeals
- Academic misconduct
- Mental health issues/concerns
- Exceptional circumstances
- Academic complaints
- Non-academic complaints

"The service was helpful in providing guidance and support on a matter which would have been extremely overwhelming had I had to progress and find out the processes alone along with my academic studies. **It has reduced a lot of personal stress so I can focus on my studies as well.**"



“The help and support I received from YUSU when going through a difficult academic misconduct investigation was fantastic. **The advisor was reassuring, supportive, and informative** and I genuinely don’t think I could have got through it without them.”

## Partnering up

ASC and the GSA continue to work closely, in order to collectively support the provision of advice and guidance to both postgraduate and undergraduate students. As the volume and complexity of postgraduate casework has increased over recent years, this collaborative working has sought to ensure that postgraduate students contacting either YUSU or the GSA receives the advice and support they need, in a timely manner and to a consistent level. It also lays the foundation and paves the way for seamlessly building a single students’ provision that supports undergraduate and postgraduate students alike.

# Things we started – and are still going!

## Communications Review, Strategy, and Rebrand

This year, we kicked off a review of our communications. With our organisation's rapid growth over the past few years, our communication and visual identity needed an upgrade to better serve students. They wanted smoother interactions and a brand that resonated with them.

To make this happen, we teamed up with a communications consultant and conducted extensive research and consultation. We reached out to friends, university partners, and students through surveys, workshops, one-on-one conversations. We asked them to describe YUSU in three words, share our strengths and weaknesses, and tell us their perspective on the Union.

The insights from this research laid the groundwork for what has now become our Communications Strategy. But the journey doesn't end here! In 2023/24, we're taking on a full organisational rebrand, ensuring that our visual identity, tone of voice, key messages, and communication channels truly reflect the needs and uniqueness of our members.

## Students' Union merger

In 2022/23, we embarked on an ambitious journey: bringing YUSU and the York Graduate Students' Association together to create a unified students' union for all York students. Throughout the year, we diligently worked on shaping a plan, engaging with hundreds of students to explore the potential benefits, challenges, and new opportunities that a merger could bring. We also consulted with trustees and legal experts to ensure the merger met legal requirements and adhered to the Charity Commission's guidelines.

Our primary focus was on aligning the merger plans with students' best interests, ensuring legal compliance, and building a financially robust framework to serve students effectively in the future. This extensive work culminated in the agreement of both trustee boards and the University Council at an AGM by the end of 2022/23, indicating the green light for the merger.

As we move into 2023/24, our attention turns to planning the transition in detail. We will engage our members with a proposal for new governing documents for the unified union. This will involve addressing questions like defining new officer team roles, integrating our website, data, and communication systems, retaining the specialised skills and experience of postgraduate staff within the broader union, and determining the approach to course, department, and faculty representation for both taught and research students.

## Housing

For a long time we have known that student housing in York is one of the most significant issues affecting our students. In York (as is the same in major university cities up and down the country) there are concerns about the availability of student accommodation, the affordability of student accommodation, and the examples of student accommodation that fall below a satisfactory standard. In 2022/23 we made significant progress in tackling the worst quality properties, as the City Council launched an expanded licensing scheme, bringing more private student housing into the scheme than ever before and giving increased legal rights to students who were living in property that failed to meet essential minimum standards. This scheme had been the subject of significant lobbying by the Union over several years and was the second key recommendation of the 2021 'Student experiences of private renting in York' research report we produced in conjunction

with Citizens Advice York.

In addition we secured new funds from the University to support students in private housing with fuel and energy bills and successfully campaigned to retain a portfolio of over 300 rooms at just £99 per week in the University's housing portfolio for the poorest students. Over the year we convinced the University of York and York St John to join us in discussions with UNIPOL, an independent student housing charity expert, to start to develop a major new housing initiative that would give students more understanding of the best available property with a Rate Your Landlord meets Trip Advisor style scheme. Contracts were signed for the new partnership over summer 2023 and should launch in 2023/24 and we hope this will also become part of a new city-wide accommodation plan for York.

## EDI – developing a strategic framework

The period saw YUSU scale up our work on EDI, with a dedicated work programme to develop and strengthen activity across this agenda in every department. Working with a one-year EDI staff lead (generously funded by the University of York), work got underway to explore and understand our strategic approach to EDI and develop an action plan for the organisation. The strategic framework that's been set out is guiding our work across our central resources and on the access and participation, and inclusive learning and representation agenda, instigating and informing a wide range of activity for the organisation. We intend to publish both the strategy and action plan, so keep an eye out!

We also introduced a new EDI policy, strengthened our HR frameworks with accreditation as a Disability Confident employer, and developed a targeted action plan to support the next steps in our ambition to provide equity of opportunity, narrow data gaps and to improve the diversity of our employed team.

## EDI and students

We developed and delivered training for a range of student groups around inclusive practice; we have developed a toolkit of guidance to empower members in inclusive practice; we have undertaken research to understand more about the lived experience of underrepresented students.

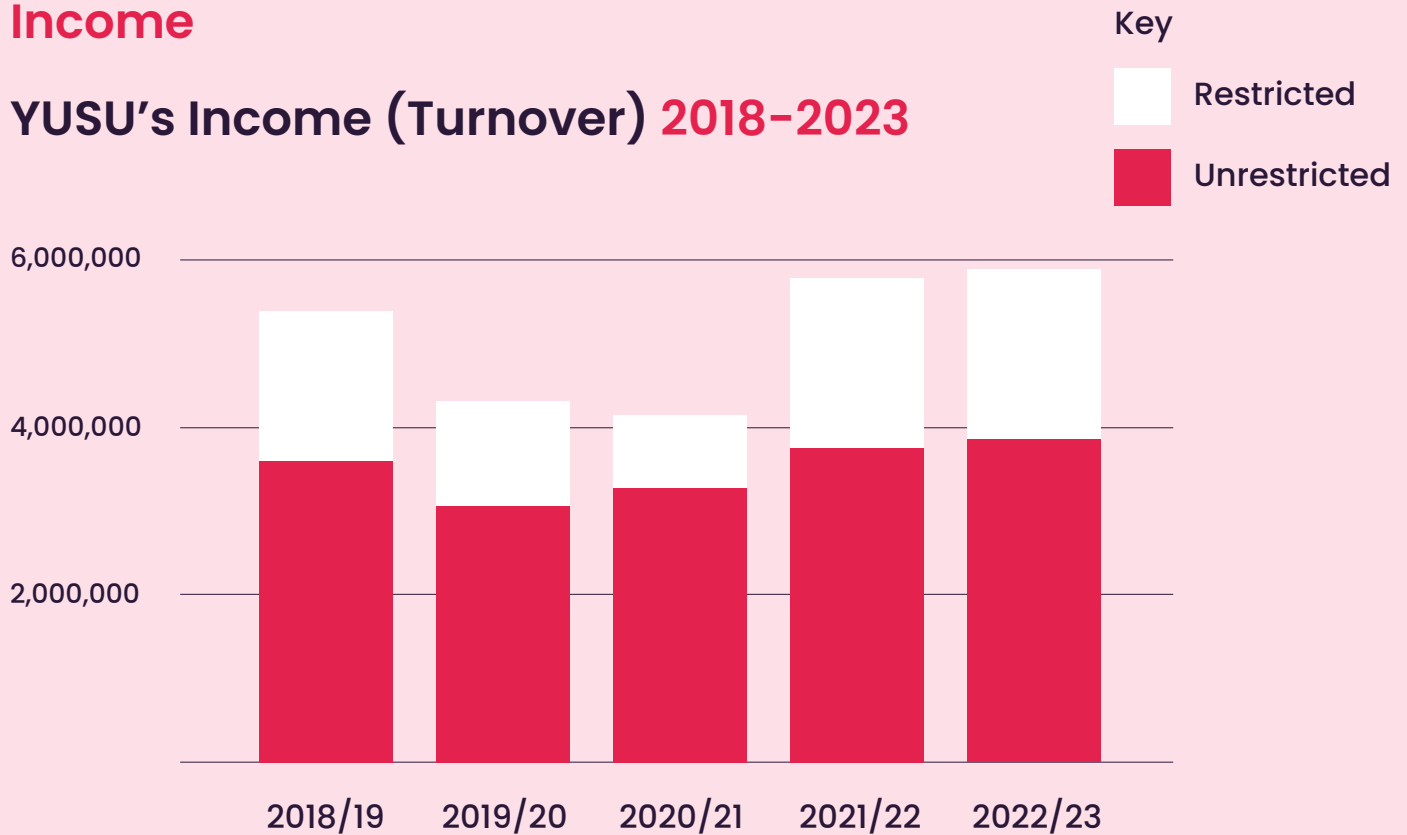
Across the period, we learned that, while the dedicated EDI role brought valued expertise that enabled us to really bolster and guide activity, EDI cannot be one person's job and

we need to focus on finding ways to build the whole of the staff team's confidence in delivering YUSU's values in this area. Looking ahead, as well as publishing the strategy and action plan, we will be publishing and commissioning further research on students' experiences of inclusion and belonging to inform future priorities.

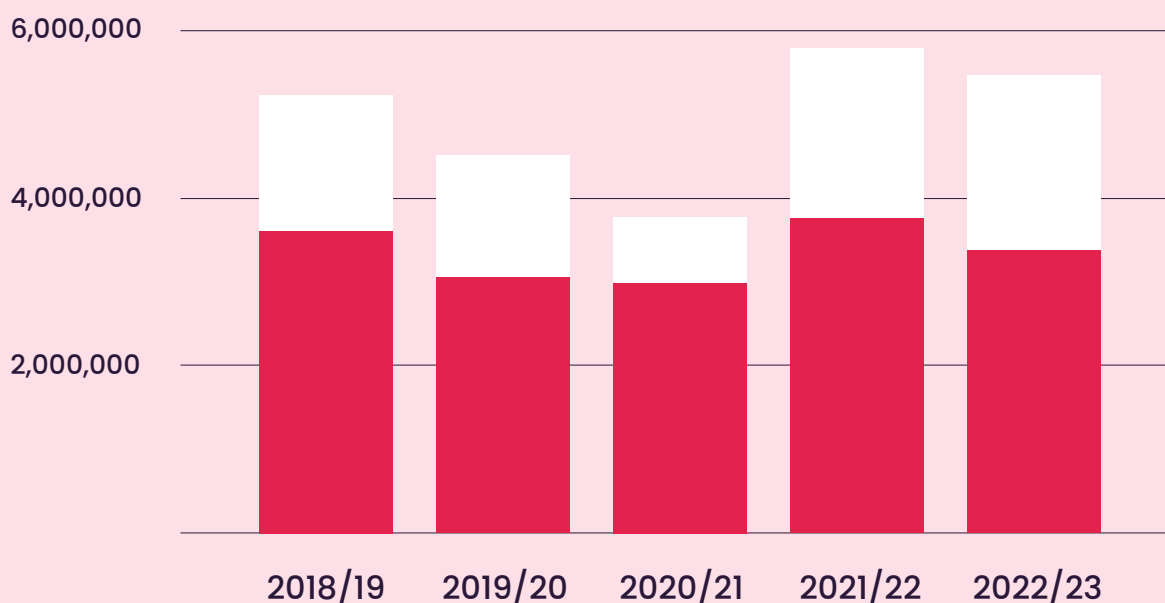
# Finances

## Income

### YUSU's Income (Turnover) 2018-2023



### YUSU's Expenditure 2018-2023





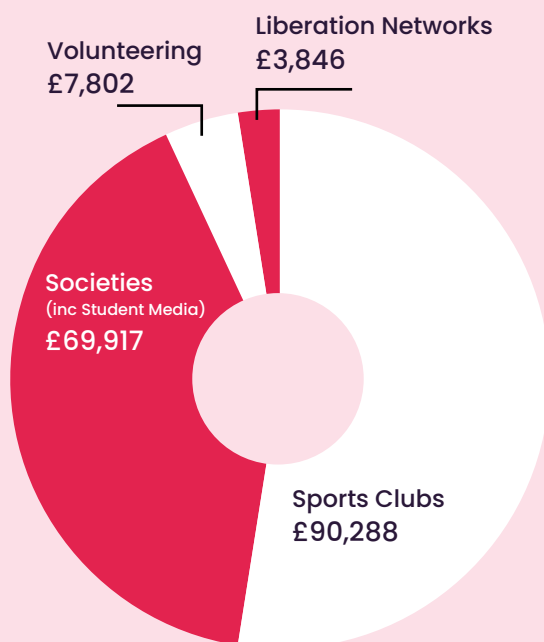
The 2022/23 year has been a bit of a mixed bag for our finances. We felt a growing sense of optimism and confidence building on campus, with students returning to some sense of normality and embracing the opportunity to socialise, to participate in sports and societies and to enjoy great nights out in town and at our events. But the freedoms that were returning were tempered by the impact of the rising cost of living.

We continue to benefit from strong support from the University in growing our block grant year on year and the Union has worked hard to balance the competing pressures of prioritising support and activities for students, whilst at the same time protecting the Union's finances so that we were able to meet our ever-increasing costs. We made some brave

(but sometimes difficult) decisions to keep the costs of our events, activities and social spaces as low as possible, to invest well in student and career staff wages (**paying £528k in student staff wages**), to provide low-cost meals, to **increase funding into activities access grants to £35k** and to subsidise our events tickets.

All of that was absolutely the right thing to do to protect both students and staff, but meant that we consciously made a loss of around £40k last year in our unrestricted accounts which had been funded from our fairly limited financial reserves. That means we will need to focus on replenishing those reserves over the coming year, whilst maintaining our investment in, and support for, students.

## Student Group Grants 2022/23



In 2022/23, YUSU **contributed a massive £171,853** in direct grants to student groups; money that helped student leaders develop and grow their activities, their membership and their support. This was in addition to the **£3,288,795 spent** on booking facilities, ensuring activities, providing equipment, training, advice, support and representation, increasing access, laying on events and providing the best student venues on campus.

# Learning & Growing

## Welcome: Changing numbers

In spite of positive ticket sales for Freshers' Festival, attendance was low – a trend we have noted in the past few years. Students are probably worn out by the time they reach Freshers' Festival (as it usually takes place towards the end of Welcome), or perhaps they want less focus on late-night events. But

looking at the numbers in this way gives us great insight into what students want from us and directly impacts our Freshers' offering in following years – just wait and see our 2023/2024 Impact Report for the results of this insight!

## Elections: Crunching the numbers

Voter turnout in the 2022/23 Elections was lower than the year before. Upon reflection there are a number of factors that may have contributed, such as a change in lead staff, continuing issues with connection in a post-Covid world.

## Elections: What we've learned

We always aim for a high elections turnout, but when that goal wasn't reached, it led us to review democratic engagement. So now, we are reflecting on the process on the whole, in undertaking research to understand why students don't engage with democracy, alongside how we can increase engagement going forward. This also means, in the longer term, considering the quality of engagement vs. high turnout.

## A balancing act: student expense claims

Our Finance team decided to make the process for students to claim expenses much easier and more streamlined and so began the task of moving the process over to SUMS (our content management system provider). However, despite all the hard work that was put in to create something workable for both staff and students, the system was too complicated for staff to work with, and so it

was decided that moving forward wasn't an option.

While it was decided to press pause on the project for the time being, it has not been totally abandoned and further development is still in the works– so let's watch this space!

# Conclusion – words from our President



It is an unprecedented time at the Union. We are on the edge of a merger which will dramatically reshape our work. Just looking at the surface though, you would not be able to tell. We are interrogating our ways of working, we are rethinking our representation, and questioning our notions of what the Union should look like. Despite this period of grand change, we are stable. This is because we are not looking to divide our membership or remove parts of our collective. Instead, we are challenging ourselves to grow; we are open to change – but only change that enfranchises.

Last year, I spoke about how the Union was responding, successfully, to an ever-shifting political and economic landscape, characterised by certain individuals in power imposing their views on others. They continue to do so. Our members are some of those who have felt the effects – and continue to do so – of decisions only intended to favour a minority. But in the face of adversity, we respond with

steadfast solidarity. Our Cost of Living response, the first in the country, is being recognised in our University's nomination for University of the Year. We expected the cycle of crisis after crisis to stop – it did not.

However, we are in the driving seat now. The Union I know today is not the one I joined last year – it is infinitely better. It

looks at itself and thinks not only about how to safeguard its current existence but also where and who it would like to be in the immediate future

This year, political leaders have propped up barriers against ambitions for diversity and equity, tested our ability to persevere in complex economic conditions, and threatened our members' best interests. We not only offset the consequences of those decisions, we actively fought back. We do not shy away from change, we embrace it.

The Officers and I had a vision for the Union: one that asks, listens and acts. We, the Union, delivered it. Whether this means huge unprecedented campaigns, coordinating the coming together of charities representing thousands, or reinventing our engagement, support, and opportunities, we deliver in times of adversity.

To our students, our staff and our partners: we are not changing who sits at the table, we are simply increasing the number of seats available. We have come a long way, but we are by no means done yet. Ultimately, faced with impossible challenges, we are better and stronger together.

**Sincerely,**  
**Pierrick Roger, YUSU President.**

