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ANNUAL REPORT 2023

UNION DEBATING SOCIETY



PUBLIC DEBATES



The Union Debating Society is unique in that it is the only UK university debate institution to host weekly public debates free of charge to all students. Originally founded in 1794, the society has been affiliated with the St Andrews Students Association since 1925. Since that date, every matriculated student of the university has automatically been a member of the UDS.

From the start of the academic to date, the society has hosted 13 public debates with guest speakers from across the UK. Speakers this year have included world renowned journalists, politicians and academics. Speakers give their time for free to address our debate chamber, but the society covers speakers travel and accommodation costs.

For the 2022/2023 academic year, £6610 was allocated to fund the society's public debate activities. The society offers overnight hotel accommodation for any guest speaker who requires it and reimburses speakers up-to the cost of a standard class return train ticket to Leuchars and Taxis.

From the start of the academic year to publication, the society has spent £3651.73 on its public debate activities. The total spend for semester one came to budget, with £2992.93 spent on public debate activities.

The nature of the academic calendar makes planning for semester two debates more difficult. £658.80 has been spent to date on semester two public debate activities. With the year still not over, this is likely to rise in the coming weeks. Overall public debate expenditure for the year is very likely to come under the original budget allocation.

COMPETITIONS



Every week, the UDS holds debate training workshops that are open to all. In addition, the society holds weekly advanced training sessions for our more able debaters. This year, the society's competitive division has attracted many new outstanding debaters.

This year, our competitive debating division has gone from strength to strength. We have had many successes in competitions across the UK and the world. Highlights from this year include a winning team at Durham IV and a breaking team at the World University Debating Championships in Madrid. This year, St Andrews hosted the SSDC's annual Pro-Am competition and will also host the annual St Andrews Open.

The total budget for IV and Open competitions this year was £1810. This is to cover the registration costs of teams that participate. So far this academic year, the society has spent £1018.99 on these competitions. Many more of these competitions take place during the summer holidays so our competitive division is still on track to be on budget for this area.

At the start of the academic year, we initially budgeted £4250 for international competitions. This was based on sending two teams and a judge to both the European and World University Debating Championships. It is unfortunate that post-covid many reg fees for competitions, specifically international ones, have been excessively hiked. Given future potential financial pressures the society will face on account of spiralling international costs, a decision was taken to axe one team from this year's worlds championship. Therefore, our total spend on international competitions this year will come to £3250.

This year St Andrews was selected to host the SSDC's annual Pro-Am tournament, with teams from across Scotland in attendance. The competition made a small loss due to signups being lower than anticipated. Reg fees for the annual St Andrews Open and costs associated with the competition have not yet been accounted for but as of writing, St Andrews based competitions have cost the society £276.40. This loss will likely be partially offset by the St Andrews Open, but St Andrews based competitions are unlikely to run at a small profit as originally intended.



The society has a £600 bursary fund to aid students from low income backgrounds with the cost of attending competitions. The bursary can be used to help fund travel and food expenses. So far this year, £499.27 has been spent on bursary grants. We expect more bursary applications for the summer so the final spend on bursary grants will come to budget. Given the expected underspend from our public debates division, there may be a possibility to reallocate some public debate funds to our bursary funds over the summer to further aid competitive debaters from low income backgrounds.

SCHOOLS

The society's competitive debating boards runs an excellent schools outreach program, lead by our schools outreach and schools competition officers. This year, we have continued our work with the charity first chances with whom we have organised debate workshops for children from disadvantaged areas. We also ran the annual St Andrews Schools competitions for schoolchildren across North-East Scotland. Our annual schools competition and paid debate workshops at independent schools has provided the society with an income of £840. This income has gone towards funding our schools outreach work and our competitive division more generally.



FUNDING

This year, the society received approximately £6000 in funding from the students association. We began the year with £9696 in reserves, built up during the covid years when expenditure was naturally lower. We also received £1000 from our sponsors. After dropping an international team, our total expenditure for the year was planned to be approximately £12,000. Notwithstanding any other income, the society planned to use £5000 of our reserves to help fund this years activities. The students association has indicated a potential rise in our annual grant once our reserves have been spent, but we don't expect the grant to rise to meet our actual annual expenditure. Rising costs post-covid has placed huge financial pressures on debating societies across the UK. Competition reg fees have increased rapidly, as has the cost of speaker accommodation and travel. Therefore, if we were to continue on our current trajectory,



the society would run out of reserves during the next academic year and would be forced to make sweeping cuts to our activities to year after. Pre-empting this, the society has started to explore other revenue streams to ensure we can continue to operate and provide St Andrews students with a program of public and competitive debates into the longer term. As stated, our schools program ran a healthy profit this year through running the St Andrews Schools Competition and workshops at

independent schools. This year, the society held our inaugural 1794 ball, named after the year the society was founded. The event was both a social and financial success. Looking forward to the next year, the society may wish to continue on the success of the 1794 ball to continue to raise external funds. In addition, the society will need to look for further ways to raise money to ensure we maximise the use of the reserves that we have left and can continue to operate at our current level in the longer term. Other Scottish debating societies have failed to forward plan in this way and are already facing the effects of cutbacks due to rapidly rising costs.

Budget Area	Projected Cost	Spend as of 9/3/23
Public debates	£6610	£3,651.73
Competitive debating	£5060	£2,649.40
St Andrews competitions	-£242.50	£276.40
Schools debating	-£325	-£840
Publicity	£220	£256.80
Socials and alumni	£175	£79.91
Bursary	£600	£499.27
Total	£12097.50	£6573.51



Board of Ten MMXXIII

Cara Shepherd - President
Andrew Longworth - Treasurer
Euan Higgins - Chief Whip
James Langmead - Chair of Ways & Means
Agnes Li - Clerk
Jenny Douce - Equity Officer
Lewis O'Neil - Steward to the House
Cyrus Chu - Media Officer
Olivia Ortlieb - Freshers Rep
Sam Gorman - DosDA

Public Debates Board

James Langmead - Chair of Ways & Means
Alp Yilmaz - Serjeant
William Finlator - Secretary

Competitive Board

Euan Higgins - Chief Whip
Alastair Bowyer - Training Officer
William Smith - Competitions Officer
Jack Jillings - Schools
Owen Goodacre - Schools
Niamh Wier - Equity

