



Trustees' Annual Report 2023/24

REFERENCE AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

The Student Publication Association CIO is a charitable incorporated organisation registered in England and Wales (number 1187383). The charity also operates using the working names “The Student Publication Association” and “The SPA”.

During the period of this report, it was registered at 46 St Olaves Road, London, E6 2PA

This report covers the accounting period from 01/05/2023 to 30/04/2024.

The trustees who served during the reporting period are:

- Matthew Ward-Perkins (Chair — trustee ex officio. Left post April 14, 2024);
- Justine Noble (Second financial officer — trustee ex officio. Left post April 14, 2024)
- Jack Patrick Wash (Chair — trustee ex officio. Elected April 14, 2024)
- Juliet Rix (Appointed Trustee. Left post April 14, 2024)
- Jemma Louise Collins (Elected Trustee)
- Aubrey Edward Lewis Allegretti (Elected Trustee)
- Geraldine Scott (Elected Trustee)
- Ollie Colle (Elected Trustee. Elected 28 May 2023).
- Richard Lewis Brooks (Appointed Trustee)
- Anttoni James Numminen (Appointed Trustee).

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The SPA is governed by a written constitution. The charity is constituted as a charitable incorporated organisation. The SPA's trustees are selected via three methods:

- Ex officio: The Chair and Second Financial Officer of the SPA serve as trustees ex officio.
- Elected: Up to four trustees are elected by the SPA's membership, serving a term of up to four years.
- Appointed: Up to four trustees are nominated by vote of the executive officers and ratified by a majority vote of the sitting trustees, serving a term of up to three years.

During this period, the charity held one AGM in April 2024, allowing members to vote on policy and direction. [The minutes for this are available online](#). A total of five motions were voted on and passed by members:

- [Trustee Term Lengths](#): It was noted that while the term limits set out above have been in use since the charity's incorporation, they had been omitted from the governing documents. This motion formerly added term limits of four years for elected trustees and three years for appointed trustees into the constitution.
- [Add Membership Officer](#): This motion notes the executive does not have a dedicated member engagement and management officer, despite being a member organisation. Currently, these duties are split between the executive. This motion adds an additional member to the executive committee and constitution to focus on membership.
- [Add Trustee Position](#): This motion notes that the charity has less than 20 volunteers, leading to stretched resources. It also notes the previous membership motion to add an executive member and wishes to keep the ratio between executive and trustees consistent. To this end, it adds a new appointed trustee to the constitution.
- [Awards Representation](#): This motion resolves that the SPA should monitor the representation and equity of awards entries, by collecting anonymised data about entrants, shortlisted, and winning entries each year, reported back to members.
- [Financial Reserves Policy](#): In 2020, the organisation set a reserves policy which mandated “the greater of 50% of expected annual turnover, or £7,500”, with the expectation of meeting this target within three years — FY23. Based on annual turnover, this would require reserves of £20,000, largely due to the facilitation of our annual conference, which is run at a loss. Currently, the organisation has yet to hit this target or move closer towards it. This motion recognises that such levels of reserves would not be practicable or a good use of charity funds. Instead, it sets out a path to holding £10,000 in reserves by 2027, by raising £2,500 in reserves each year. The motion also sets a requirement for the organisation to hold two bank accounts, one for reserves.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Clause 3 of the SPA's Constitution sets out that “the object of the SPA is to advance the education of student journalists in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.”

The SPA has carried out this object by:

- Hosting more than 20 informational training resources that are freely available on the SPA website. The SPA has also created further training resources and updated existing ones during this period.

- Facilitating collaboration and peer learning between student journalists from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland by providing social media platforms to host discussions. Currently, the charity works across LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter/X. Further communication between student journalists is facilitated through the work of the SPA's team of volunteer Regional Officers and Project Officers.
- Providing individual guidance to student journalists on request, including supporting them in defending their right to practice journalism.

The SPA has further carried out this object by:

- Organising the SPA National Conference in Bristol, the first time the event has been held in South West England, providing extensive vocational training for more than 250 student journalists over the course of a weekend. This was our largest attendance to date. In addition:
 - To ensure this conference was accessible to the widest range of people possible, we ran a Financial Assistance Scheme, covering tickets, travel and accommodation for those who would be otherwise unable to attend. In total, seven students made use of the fund.
 - The SPA also worked to secure £14,000 of sponsorship for the event, which was used to subsidise the sale of all tickets.
 - Running a series of practical one-to-one sessions at the annual conference, including copy clinics, design drop-ins, and CV advice. These were used by dozens of student journalists across the weekend, allowing them to gain more personalised advice and journalistic education.
 - The SPA also collaborated with the external publisher Journo Resources to offer paid work and training for six student journalists, who reported from the event.
- Organising a national awards scheme, with 26 categories, offering student journalists the chance to get feedback on their work from professional journalists, as well as recognition. The SPA received more than 1,200 entries in 2023/24.
 - The SPA also ran a series of regional awards, offering further feedback and recognition to student journalists across all eight regions.
- Hosting series of virtual workshops hosted online and provided free of charge, run by trustees and external journalism training colleges. The workshops focused on skills relevant to student journalists.
- Launching an editor's survey of member publications to understand the needs of our users in greater detail:
 - A total of 13 publications offered in-depth insights into how they are funded and supported by their universities or unions, how the SPA could better support them, and the biggest challenges they are facing.

- This was supplemented by an in-person editors' coffee morning at the SPA Conference, to facilitate peer learning and in-depth feedback for the charity.
- A complete relaunch of our website, with a focus on great accessibility and ease of use. Our previous website had not been updated for more than five years, with a new redesign allowing for easier access to online training resources, booking of events, and the ability to add further functionality in future.
- Our first-ever regional conference in the Republic of Ireland provided a day of vocational training to 47 student journalists, consisting of workshops, talks, and panels. This is the first time an in-person SPA event has been held in the region.

Of the six projects listed directly above, five have been completed. One, the website relaunch has completed the first phase. Work continues to the second phase to build a membership hub to allow for more peer learning between members and the construction of an alumni network.

The Trustees are satisfied that, due to the freely accessible nature of resources produced and shared by the SPA this year, the SPA meets the statutory requirement to act for the public benefit. The Trustees have, through the course of the reporting period, referred to guidance published by the Charity Commission for England and Wales relating to the public benefit requirement when making decisions.

During the reporting period, the SPA ran a Financial Assistance grant-issuing scheme. These grants were intended to cover the cost of attendance at the SPA's 2024 Annual Conference and were to be funded by a combination of restricted fund donations and through the SPA's general funds. The Trustees are satisfied that the grants would be issued in keeping with the SPA's object and public benefit, as they were specifically targeted at student journalists who would either be financially prohibited from attending the event or who face other barriers to journalistic education. The Trustees are also satisfied that grant money would be spent solely in support of these aims, as applications were reviewed by a sub-committee of the Trustees, and spending of the grant money is carried out directly by the SPA, or reimbursed on production of a receipt detailing approved expenses.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

In keeping with the SPA's objectives, the Trustees identified three major goals relating to the organisation of events:

- To host a vocational conference focused on journalistic education, at a cost lower than comparable conferences;
- To run a bursary scheme to widen access to the conference, covering the costs of attendance;
- To disseminate and promote the use of free-to-access resources hosted on our website.

All of these goals were completed within the reporting period. An additional goal of the SPA was to produce training materials to be hosted on the SPA website and made publicly accessible to all. The SPA has released a number of such training materials during this reporting period and also relaunched our website to further these objectives.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

At the end of this reporting period, the SPA held a total of £5.09 in accounts managed by it. No funds of the SPA are materially in deficit. This report also notes that at the end of the reporting period, the organisation was owed some £3,800 in overdue invoices, as follows:

- University of Cardiff — £1,500
- News UK & Ireland — £1,500
- Savanta — £800

While the SPA does not aim to make a profit, the trustees do not view this level of reserves and cash flow as acceptable. In their view, it is a risk to the charity. A review into the low levels of cashflow identified a number of contributing factors:

- Invoices for sponsorship of the national conference were paid late;
- Sponsorship income being made up of a small number of larger payments, meaning late payments have a larger impact;
- An overspend on speaker travel at the national conference.

As a result, the trustees have commissioned urgent strengthening of financial controls to safeguard the charity's future, as well as plans to significantly increase reserve levels to prevent future incidents. New financial controls include:

- The implementation of a new digital expenses system that requires trustee or chair approval in order to make claims, as well as mandating receipts alongside claims.
- Moving to a new bank account that allows for the SPA to have its charity debit cards. This is with a view to eliminating payments made on personal cards.
- Setting up a second bank account to store reserves, to allow for a greater separation of funds. Policy to complement this states that funds cannot be moved from the reserves account to general use without a vote of the executive and trustees.
- New speaker booking policies; a points-based system will better inform budgets when booking speaker travel, allowing a geographically sensitive budget assessment and live updates. A new travel booking procedure and set travel booker roles will also check this and provide rolling updates.
- A new cashflow budget projection to be used alongside the overall budgets used by the executive and trustees, to offer an early warning system for the effects of late payment.
- The SPA will also enforce late payment legislation, as set out by the UK Government.

The trustees also decided that the SPA must significantly increase its reserve level in order to ensure that it is protected against further incidents that could have a negative effect on the SPA's financial position. This is also necessary to achieve the goals set out in the reserves motion. These steps include:

- A ticket levy will be added to all future conference payments, starting from the 2025 National Conference. The value of the levy will be set when ticket prices are decided, with funds directly transferred to the reserves account. Depending on the level of subsidy set each year, this could bring in £250–£1,250 based on current ticket sales.
- A dedicated donations and fundraising campaign to bring in additional general funds to the charity is to be launched — work on this has subsequently begun in the next reporting period.
- The trustees will investigate additional schemes the charity might benefit from, for example:
 - GiftAid;
 - Grants;
 - VAT Relief;
 - Employer charitable giving — subsequent investigation into this area in the next reporting period has allowed the charity to sign up to a scheme with a number of the trustees' employers, projected to bring in £2,500pa.

On the basis of the measures set out above, the trustees are satisfied that the SPA can continue to operate as a going concern, with a review of the above measures in the next reporting period,

EXEMPTIONS FROM DISCLOSURE

The SPA has not sought any exemptions from disclosure in accordance with applicable law.

FUNDS HELD AS CUSTODIAN TRUSTEE ON BEHALF OF OTHERS

The SPA has not acted as a custodian trustee on behalf of others during the reporting period.