

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

12 April 2013

### **UQ UNION WELCOMES INDEPENDENT AUDIT REPORT FINDINGS**

The University of Queensland Union (UQU) has today welcomed the findings of the audit report into the Union's governance and financial management, and announced an Action Plan to implement the improvements that have been identified through that process.

The auditor's report was commissioned by the University late last year in response to various allegations made during the 2012 student election campaign.

The UQ Union today released the report of the auditor's findings. The report found:

- there was no evidence to support the allegation that Union records had been changed and documents disposed of;
- there was no evidence of any irregularities relating to fraud or misappropriation of student funds;
- the amendments to the UQU Constitution passed on 25/3/11 and 10/8/12 were made in accordance with the Union's Constitution (while noting some minor procedural matters that could be addressed); and
- the Union's accounting processes and controls were reasonable for an organisation of the Union's nature and size, and within the requirements of the Funding and Services Agreement ('FSA') and Student Services and Amenities Fee ('SSAF') Guidelines.

"The Union has fully cooperated with the auditors and the university in their investigations and provided all documentation requested," said the new UQU President, Mr Rohan Watt. "We have been very transparent and allowed the Union to be subjected to intense scrutiny".

"We have always said that the allegations were politically motivated by those candidates and their supporters who were disappointed that they were not elected at last year's election to run the Union," said Mr Watt.

"Nonetheless, it is important that – once raised – these matters are investigated so that students can have confidence in their Union and elected representatives.

"The new UQU Executive is committed to having the highest standards of integrity, accountability and transparency in relation to its activities and the funds we manage on behalf of students and the broader University community," said Mr Watt.

"We are proud to be widely regarded as the best-run and most student-focused student union in the country, and have worked hard to earn that reputation. But retaining the mantle of the country's best-run student union means we need to regularly review our internal processes and make any improvements that are identified.

"We have therefore developed a detailed Action Plan to address some of the procedural, accountability and financial governance issues that were identified in the audit process as capable of being improved," said Mr Watt.

The key components of the UQ Union's Action Plan are:

- improving governance arrangements;
- strengthening financial management and accountability;
- reforming electoral regulations and developing an Election and Campaign Charter; and
- upgrading communications to members to enhance transparency.

The new UQU Executive is strongly committed to its annual elections being held in a fair, transparent and accountable manner, and has approached the University to seek their cooperation in introducing an Election and Campaign Charter to strengthen the democratic processes by which UQ students elect their student representatives.

"We expect all of the measures contained in the Action Plan will be implemented prior to the commencement of second semester this year, which is also prior to this year's UQU elections," Mr Watt said.

The other issue that the audit report makes apparent is that the terms of the existing Funding and Services Agreement ('FSA') and Student Services and Amenities Fee ('SSAF') Guidelines are defective to the extent that they are insufficiently clear and precise, and in particular don't enable certain items of expenditure to be definitively classified as being within or not within certain categories or types of expenditure.

"This is a manifestly unsatisfactory situation that needs to be addressed", Mr Watt said.

To remedy this problem, Mr Watt said that the new UQU Executive was determined to make the existing regulations clearer and more robust, and in particular to make it crystal clear that expenditure by the UQU on co-branded materials will be prohibited, both to avoid future controversies that distract from the Union's core role, and to rule a clear line in the sand under this matter.

"The fact is, it has been common practice at the University of Queensland in recent decades for successive teams running the Student Union to advertise their team name as part of the normal operating practices of the Union.

"While this is not prohibited under the current constitution and regulations, the new UQU Executive does not agree that this kind of expenditure is desirable or appropriate," said Mr Watt. "We believe that the practice must not continue, and is inconsistent with current expectations. We have listened and have resolved to explicitly prohibit such expenditure.

"We believe that UQ students will strongly support the stance the new Executive are taking in putting these reforms forward to the Student Council, as they will make UQU not only the best-run student Union in the country, but also the most transparent," Mr Watt said.

"Equally importantly, these reforms will not dilute the Union's continued strong support for high quality retail outlets, student support services, a record number of student clubs and societies, and popular activities and events sponsored by the Union – all of which play such an important part in enhancing the student experience and campus life at UQ.

"That's what the Union is all about, not politics," said Mr Watt, "and that's why I ran for President to ensure those services are delivered for the benefit of all students attending what is undoubtedly one of Australia's premier teaching and research universities".

**Note to media: The independent auditor's report 'Summary of Findings' and the UQU's Action Plan For Enhancing Accountability, Governance and Transparency 2013 are attached.**

Contact:

Mr Rohan Watt, President, University of Queensland Union,  
Phone (07) 3377-2200

Email [president@uqu.com.au](mailto:president@uqu.com.au)

ENDS