

DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING 2 DECEMBER 2020

Members present: Anthony Baker, Clare Powne, Oliver Colling, Seun Twins, Ewan Swift, Anna Marshall, Nailah Haque, Sarah McAllister, Caragh Aylett-Bullock

In attendance: Gareth Hughes, Kirsty Morrison, Martin Horrocks, Georgina Lambert, Rebecca Henderson, Richard Bruce, Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

Apologies: Chris Nash

Any underlined text is confidential and for Board members only, and will not be included in the open papers published on the website.

Usual business items

1. OPENING OF MEETING

Noted: apologies, no conflicts of interest or notification of any other urgent business.

The Board were introduced to Richard Bruce, who will be in role from January 2021 as Policy Manager, while Rebecca Henderson is on maternity leave.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

Accepted: the minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2020.

The Chief Executive introduced the new action log document to the Board.

3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Received: a report from each of the Board's Committees

Accepted: decisions made by the Committee on behalf of the Board not otherwise appearing on the agenda.

OC presented an update from Performance and Delivery Committee. A verbal update was given regarding changes to the planned JSS scheme as it was replaced by an extension of the furlough scheme. Trustees discussed the adjustments to campus and teaching for students under the new lockdown and received an Adjusted Delivery Report. The Committee were provided with the Durham SU working arrangements which outlined some of the approaches taken to manage delivery over the autumn and winter. A special meeting will be held on 16 December to discuss cyber security, Data Protection and remote working.

CP presented an update from People and Culture Committee. A student steering group has been created involving up to six student members to support the democracy review work. Miragold was appointed during the tender process as the external partner delivering the research section of the review. The Committee approved the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Leave Policy and Performance Improvement Policy.

MH presented an update from Fundraising Committee on behalf of CN. The Committee approved a process for Student Group loans. DUCK have chosen 12 charities which they will be fundraising for in the 2020/2021 academic year, which were approved by the Committee. DUCFS proposed a new sponsorship contract with a commission element, which was approved by the Committee as a trial for 2020/2021, to be reviewed each year. The Committee will meet tomorrow to continue with work on the Fundraising Code of Practice, which should report progress in the coming months.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Received: the Chief Executive's report on Durham SU's performance since the last meeting, and any urgent items requiring guidance from the trustees.

All of the Durham SU staff team will be furloughed during the Christmas break to maximise rest time, reduced demand on service, and the opportunity to realise savings. In previous years, there has been no demand on services during this period. End of term communications are being worked up and flexibility exists to bring staff may back earlier if needed for emergent issues.

Concerns were raised about a long period of time with no staff available, but the Chief Executive and Chair had clear worries that staff were at risk of burn out, and a longer break would mitigate the likelihood of longer-term harm to the organisation. The University were also closed to general business in this period.

The Chief Executive confirmed that Katie Shaw had been appointed as the new Interim Director of Democracy and Strategy, and will be starting her role in January 2021.

Assembly had passed a motion regarding the Durham Union Society. There was little risk in the motion, so the Chief Executive had not tabled it for separate consideration, but the trustees would wish to be aware that it was possible that Durham SU would be asked to support part of the DUS portfolio, as students running activities no longer wished to be associated with DUS. There were no financial or legal considerations thought controversial in this work.

5. FINANCE REPORT

Received: the Finance Report, including the year-end report for 2019/2020, and management accounts to period 3 (October 2020).

The Finance Manager presented the report and stated the accounts were good and Durham SU was in a reasonably strong position. The year-end accounts came out marginally better than expected, which is positive. The annual audit has now been complete and the sign off meeting with Haines Watts is scheduled for next week. Reserves have been depleted as was expected during this period due to no trading and a decision to top-up furloughed salaries in the first four months of the furlough scheme. A point to note was that holiday not taken in the previous year would appear to be a £19k liability in the accounts, but this would reverse in August and then will be released into the current year's funds.

Cash flow is sound, lower than this time last year due to money being spent on Kingsgate.

The Chief Executive confirmed that budget for media services will need to include more long-term investment in equipment and facilities and not just funds for printing.

Good governance items

6. DURHAM SU ELECTION DELIVERY

Agreed: effective delivery for the Durham SU elections in February 2021 and plan to address the University Secretary's review of the 2020 elections.

Discussions carried on from the previous Board meeting moving forward and looking at the developed election guidance which was informed largely by the University Secretary's review of the 2020 elections. The operational aspects of the election, however, will remain largely the same because they have been shown to be more than suitable for purpose and it needs to balance the difference between a successful election and an election with controversy.

Peter Robertson from NUS will be continuing as Returning Officer, which was ratified by Assembly at its last meeting.

The Chief Executive is now able to reflect on the future of the Deputy Returning Officer position due to maternity cover position now being in post. This will be discussed with the successful post and feedback will be provided to the Board in January.

It was suggested that after the previous year's elections, there should be a particular focus on the mental health of candidates during this period and what Durham SU can do to support.

The Board agreed the delivery of the 2021 Durham SU elections and the Guidance framework.

Strategic development items

7. STRATEGIC RISK

Considered: the Strategic Risk Register.

The Chief Executive presented the paper, which was provided as an update against the Strategic Risk Register presented to the Board in May 2020. Outlined were the activities taken in relation to the risk in the period from May 2020, the current recommendation as to how the risk ought to be considered in line with the Risk Policy, and any likely future steps.

Potential risk could be posed to the governance of the organisation due to the decision to not appoint student trustees before February 2021 and leave the current posts vacant, with 3 lay trustees also ending their term of office in August 2021. Trustees will be elected (student) or recruited (lay), likely in advance of Board meeting on 17 March 2021. This is considered enough to reduce likelihood of disruption to good governance.

There are currently no commercial risks to the organisation as trading is no longer happening. The development of a longer-term commercial strategy is likely to commence in Easter term 2021.

The Finance Manager will look to provide a projection of cash flow for 2021/2022 academic year at the request of the Chair, as this would be needed to recommend to the Board that the organisation is not a going concern. The University have not yet given formal confirmation on funding for next year but it is expected to be broadly similar to this year.

It was noted that remote working could significantly reduce the productivity of the organisation, however this impact of working from home has been reduced and in January 2021 the Senior Leadership Team will be exploring the future of blended working and what this will look like for the organisation. The Employee Engagement Survey is due to be rolled out in spring 2021 and will contain questions specific to home and blended working patterns.

Mediation with common room presidents is still on-going. This is not as far on as was expect due to emergent priorities taking place with the COVID-19 pandemic.

8. BEING THE AUTHORITY OF DURHAM STUDENTS

Received: the discussion paper on the 'Being the Authority on Durham students' strategic priority.

Discussed: the theory and approach suggested in the paper.

The Director of Campaigns presented the paper and stated that Durham SU's 'back on course' strategic priorities, agreed by the Board in July, set out the rationale on how to improve, adjust and shape the work of being an 'authority on Durham students'. The aims are to explore the principles, framework and approach which may best embed and improve how to learn as an organisation, with members, and turn that into action with students. However, it is not the purpose of the work to describe or recommend formal decision making process or structures (this being done within the 'processes support student power' strategic priority). It is to highlight the importance of underpinning formative learning, which should be improved and better supported.

The Board discussed the theory and approach suggested in the paper and were asked to send any further comments or input to the Director of Campaigns directly.