# DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## MINUTES OF A MEETING OF 8 December 2023

---

**Members present:** Clare Powne, Graeme Osborn, Deborah Acheampong, Freddy Fossey-Warren, Ben Thomas, Anna Robinson, Haf Serajee, William Brown, Dan Lonsdale, Skye Carroll, Dylan Jones, Liam Isaac, Hannah Sketchley

**In attendance:** Rob Drury, Gareth Hughes, Kirsty Morrison, Martin Horrocks, Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

**Apologies:** None

---

**Usual business**

### 1. Opening of the meeting

**NOTED:** no apologies or any other urgent business.

A conflict of interest was noted for all Durham SU staff and Officers for item 7, as this directly affects everyone employed by the organisation.

The delegation statement had been included in the pack, but with no significant changes, just clarification of the decisions to not hold Committee meetings in the year.

### 2. Minutes of the previous meeting and actions

**APPROVED:** minutes of the meetings on 23 June 2023 and on 15 September 2023.

It was noted that the minutes of the Durham SU/Durham University Strategic Collaboration meeting had not yet been seen by trustees but had been noted in the minutes of the last meeting. Minutes will be brought to the next meeting of the trustees.

**The Trustees APPROVED the updated Delegation Statement.**

### 3. Chief Executive's Report

**NOTED:** the report from the Chief Executive on actions taken since the last meeting of the Board of Trustees and emergent issues requiring the trustees' attention.

The Director of Services had successfully concluded the process of protecting Palatinate from threats against its intellectual property, and Durham SU has registered 'Palatinate' as a trademark. Governance and improvement actions have continued with several of the editorial board undertaking additional training.

Durham University in October refused to distribute the usual weekly email from the President to all students, because it asked students to consider joining a collective complaint about the institution's handling of the marking and assessment boycott. It is likely that Durham SU will chose to put this dispute in the public domain if UEC continues to insist it acted entirely properly, because the risk UEC will exercise further editing rights over student interest communications shouldn't be accepted lightly.

## 4. Finance Report

**NOTED:** the Finance Report for the first quarter of 2023/2024

The Finance Manager presented the report and said that the previous year's accounts would be covered by the auditors in a separate agenda item.

Cash flow is good, as usual, and we are currently look at moving some into other account to ensure we take advantage of the best interest rates.

Reserves have been recalculated based on last year and will built back up with a 2% surplus each year (around 20k); the timeframe will be shortened if the surplus is higher.

**Strategic development business**

## 5. Student Voice and National Student Survey

**NOTED:** the Student Voice and National Student Survey report.

This was the start of 5-year strategic work to improve this area, with 2023/2024 being year one. The 2023 NSS score is the best result Durham SU has ever achieved but is still not great, this is reflection of the institution we work with, with comparative universities are also on the lower end of the scores.

Durham University is not good at student voice and are increasingly aware that this is the case, and the responsibility to address the issue. A Student Voice working group has been formed from the Durham University Education Committee, and the Postgraduate Academic Officer and Undergraduate Academic Officer are both Co-Chair of the working group.

## 6. Officer Portfolio Review

**APPROVED:** a new Standing Order, adopting a review of officer portfolios.

The proposal seeks to ensure that the Officer Committee effectively addresses the priorities of Durham students, the student population, and the Durham University strategy.

The resource allocated to 5.0 FTE sabbatical Officers will be reduced to 3.0 FTE full-time Officers. The resource released will be redeployed to 12 part-time Officer positions, offered between 7 and 14 hours per week. 7 hours per week for each role would be cost-neutral. However, the University may offer additional funding, which will allow for more hours per role. Durham SU could also prioritise enhanced hours from the existing budget.

The Common Room roles may work slightly differently in that the Officer would not be an employee of Durham SU and would remain an employee of the common room or University.

The three full-time roles will be elected in February, but there is still work to be done around the part-time roles, which will be elected in Easter term. Assembly asked that it consider a new Standing Order for elections before any part-time roles were elected.

The trustees will need to consider the Board composition as a consequence of this decision; the Articles set an upper limit for Officer, student, and lay trustees, but this is a cap and there is no lower limit., provided that remunerated (Officer) members are in the minority. The lay trustees, who had not been part of formative discussions and who had not been at Assembly, asked that they be given the opportunity to contribute to further examples of decisions which may have implications for how the trustees conduct their business in advance of students making any decisions.

It was noted that there was a specific part-time role for Postgraduate Research students but not Postgraduate Taught students. The Academic Officers said that this was not a concern, as the needs of PGT students were not that dissimilar to that of UGT students, whereas PGR students have different needs and requirements.

**The Board approved the new Standing Order and asked for a future paper to support discussion on the composition of the Board.**

## 7. Employment Terms and Conditions

**APPROVED:** recommendations of a working group into terms and conditions for career staff.

Durham SU have considered a wide range of flexible working initiatives to provide enhanced working conditions for employees, including:

- A change to career staff standard contracted hours of work.
- An exploration of a four-day working week over the summer holidays.
- An enhanced annual leave allowance.
- A pay benchmarking exercise.
- A proposed change to the performance management framework.

All Durham SU staff members left the room while the remaining trustees voted, as this directly impacted them. There remained a quorum of trustees, with eight members present.

The Board asked that a full review and evaluation on impact on services, officer inductions, students and external stakeholder be provided as part of the exploration of a four-day working week over the summer holidays.

The Board previously approved a 3% CoL award for salaried staff. Durham SU can now afford an additional 1.5% award, and the trustees adjusted the budget based on a 4.5% increase.

**The Board approved the additional 1.5% CoL award for salaried staff.**

**Good governance business**

## 8. Report of the Auditors

**RECEIVED:** the report of the Auditors

Haines Watts, Durham SU's auditors, presented their report. The notes need to be refined but the accounts will be unaffected. There was nothing major to report, most of the risks noted are not specific to Durham SU but are informed by experiences from across the voluntary sector. The was nothing to report on systems and controls, which is very good and shows good management. The Finance team had done very well.

The auditors were happy with the budgets and there is a good relationship with the University so there is no risk to funds over the next 12 months.

It Durham SU will re-tender for auditors in 2024, as it has been five years due to an extension agreed because of the pandemic.

The Trustees will sign off on the accounts alongside the annual report in February with correct notes and required amendments, but the figures are unlikely to change.

## 9. Strategic Risk

**APPROVED:** the Risk Policy and **NOTED:** recommendations on emergent risk management.

A reflection on strategic risk in the previous year was provided for review, as well as a restatement of the Strategic Risk Register.

The Chief Executive had to prioritise managing two emergent risks personally as the Secretary to Assembly. Limited resource, capacity, and capability means that there is not currently anyone else in the organisation able to deal with these risks. This is something to think about when discussing funding with the University for increased capacity in this area.

The first emergent risk is likely to be an entry on the Strategic Risk Register in February 2024, and is Student-Led Fundraising. This risk arises because of a dispute with a charity partner that cannot be resolved, and which may result in a formal complaint. Although the complaint cannot result in the outcome desired, it has exposed weaknesses in practice previously understood to be low risk.

The second emergent risk is best viewed as a one-off incident, which has arisen because activity is being challenged, and the activity and the challenge may receive a high degree of scrutiny. The risk is associated with a motion voted upon at the last meeting of Assembly, which discussed solidarity with Palestine.

The trustees asked that communication be provided on any on-going and emergent risks to ensure they are kept in the loop with what is happening. The trustees accepted the recommendations that activity was within agreed risk tolerance.

## 10. Management of Interests: other student organisations

**APPROVED:** the framework for working with other student organisations.

This was a framework informed by Charity Commission guidance for the assessment of Durham SU's interests relative to the interests of other organisations. This has particular relevance to trustees that also hold positions with other student organisations, but no conflict of interest was noted or agreed to be necessarily declared in reference to agreeing the framework.

The assessment exercise will be run with the organisations noted but the framework will also be used for any future organisations identified.

# Items for Information

## 11. Social Media Policy

**APPROVED:** the Social Media Policy.

5.6 in the policy needed to be reworded to make clear that student groups have affiliations with youth wings of parties not the party themselves. Clarification needs to be provided around what can and cannot be talked about regarding political views. There is a scheduled session for managers in January 2024 for a briefing on general election and Charity Commission CC9 guidance, to which all trustees will be invited.

## 12. DEaCE Ratification

**APPROVED:** the ratification of the Durham Estranged and Care Experienced Students Association, and an amendment to the relevant Standing Order.

## 13. Any Other Business

**NOTED:** any other urgent business.

The Chair noted that the Chief Executive’s Annual Review had been completed, and the report would be circulated to all members electronically.