

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING 27 JANUARY 2021

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

**In attendance:** Gareth Hughes, Kirsty Morrison, Martin Horrocks, Katie Shaw, Rebecca Henderson, Jamie Caress, Gillian Benjamin (Haines Watts) Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

**Apologies:** Nailah Haque

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, and no notification of any other urgent business.

The Board were introduced to Jamie Caress, Opportunities Manager, and Katie Shaw, Director of Democracy and Strategy.

CN advised of a conflict of interest on item 4 arising from his employment with HMRC.

#### **2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

**Accepted:** the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2020, with an updated version of the action log.

#### **3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES**

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

OC presented an update from Performance and Delivery Committee. A special meeting had been held in December to look at Data Protection and Cyber Security. The Committee approved the assessment, action plan and amendments to the Data Protection and Information Security Policy. The Committee approved the Cyber Security Action Plan and the new Remote Working and Device Use Policy.

The Chief Executive added that the Director of Campaigns previously lead on information governance, but was now on Maternity Leave. Lauren Hodgson will coordinate the management team's Information Governance Committee, and Ross Kitching is leading on cyber-security.

There had been no further meetings of People and Culture Committee and Fundraising Committee since the last Board meeting.

#### **4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**Received:** the Chief Executive's report.

The Chief Executive confirmed the Durham SU response to the third national lockdown. Durham SU had pressed the University to think more than one term ahead, with a focus on articulating expectations for residential charges in that period, a pragmatic approach to planning and delivering social activity and mitigations for assessment and a student safety net.

The furlough scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021. The Finance and Opportunities Teams will continue to be enrolled, with most staff being enrolled in the scheme for a two week period during Easter.

The Staff Engagement Survey will be open from next week. The survey will be open from 15 February to 5 March. A full report will follow to People and Culture Committee.

The Chair of Performance and Delivery Committee has agreed to join a conversation with the Chief Executive and an Officer and counterparts from Sunderland SU, to explore possibilities for collaboration on shared corporate services.

The Democracy Review research phase has now closed. This is still very initial data so a further update will be shared at the March meeting of the Board.

The Board had a discussion on the importance of opening up Assembly online for all students and looked at the governance and operational implications of doing this. A further discussion will be held outside of the meeting with the Chair and a small working group of trustees.

## **5. FINANCE REPORT**

**Received:** the Finance Report and management accounts to period 5 (December 2020).

Finances are healthy, with reduced spending at the present time. Cash flow forecasts until the end of next year are based on a high degree of uncertainty of what might happen in the next 12 months. Any ability to rebuild reserve levels would be desirable.

To December 2020, Durham SU has claimed £160000 from the furlough scheme but, as the scheme retires in April, an update would follow as further information is released.

## *Good governance items*

## **6. REPORT OF THE AUDITORS**

**Received:** the report of the Auditors.

Gillian Benjamin presented the audit report including the draft statutory accounts for 2019/2020.

The financial impact of Covid-19 was significant, although confirmation from the University on the level of grant for 2021/2022 means that Durham SU remains a going concern. There were a few low priority recommendations for systems and controls development, but no concerns that the Auditors wished to draw to the attention of the trustees.

The 2019/2020 accounts show a similar income pattern as the previous year but from different sources, including the furlough scheme and University grant, with a reduction in commercial and DUCK income. The reserves have reduced, reflecting reduced income. Durham SU should now look to rebuild reserves in line with the Reserves Policy. Overall, the accounts show a strong position considering the significant difficulties of the year.

The Auditors suggested that Durham SU may wish to bring forward its registration with the fundraising regulator.

The Chief Executive noted that the Finance Manager and team did an excellent job of ensuring everything ran smoothly with a remote audit as well as general operations.

The Finance Manager confirmed that the report will be made available to students at the All Student Meeting, which is likely to be online, and relating documents will be published.

### *Strategic development items*

#### **7. RECRUITMENT OF LAY TRUSTEES**

**Agreed:** To appoint Clare Powne to a second three-year term as a lay trustee, and a process for the recruitment of two lay trustees.

Clare Powne has indicated that she is willing to serve another three-year term. The reappointment of an experienced trustee with a background in higher education senior management will be a significant advantage for Durham SU and will help to mitigate strategic risk to good governance.

A recruitment campaign will be focussed on helping interested candidates from a broad range of backgrounds who have an interest in supporting students' unions to present their experiences, skills and interests, so that a decision can be made from amongst a number of qualified people. People and Culture Committee is the formal interview panel for the recruitment of lay trustees, with contribution from the Chair and Vice-Chair. The Chief Executive will act as Secretary to the panel.

**The Board appointed Clare Powne to a second three-year term as a lay trustee and agreed the process for the recruitment of two lay trustees.**

#### **8. REFLECTIONS ON STRATEGY AND NEXT STEPS**

**Considered:** a reflection on the limitations of the 2016 Durham SU strategy, and lessons for development of work into 2021/2022.

Durham SU is looking to the next academic year but needs to maintain delivery to the best possible degree until the end of the current year. There is very little opportunity to begin any new work without over-stretching the organisation.

The trustees agreed that Durham SU should seek to address:

- Engagement of communities of student leaders with strategic themes, which may be supported by the democracy review.
- How 'changing the culture of Durham University' could usefully appear as a strategic theme, and how this would be different to general equality and diversity work.
- A priority focus on fewer, more significant long-term campaigns, balanced with some capacity to respond to timely and urgent concerns.
- The contribution of insight, research, and democracy to informing decision-making at Durham SU.
- The need to invest in strategic communications infrastructure.

The Chief Executive was asked to act on this basis, and bring an update to the May meeting using the planning framework proposed in the paper.

### *Information Items*

#### **9. RESPONSE TO PALATINATE REGULATION**

**Considered:** a report on Palatinate actions in January 2021 and next steps.