

DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 16 JULY 2025

Members present: Graeme Osborn (Chair) Dan Lonsdale, Moitreya Ganguli, Calum Cook, Oliver Davis, Olivia Hong, Abi Taylor, Fran Brandon-Higgs, Ellie Dinsdale, Caleb Ross

In attendance: Gareth Hughes, Martin Horrocks, Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

Apologies received: Rob Drury, Liam Isaac, Helen Cutting, Emma Clarke, Josh Loan-Clarke, Dylan Jones, Roisin Cunningham

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

Usual business

1. Opening of the meeting

NOTED a welcome to incoming members and guests.

NOTED any apologies, any interests, and any other urgent business requested for the trustees to consider at this meeting.

APPROVED any Items for Information listed on the agenda, without discussion, unless a trustee requests that a matter be considered by the meeting.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting, and actions

APPROVED the minutes of the meeting on 28 May 2025.

REVIEWED: [action log 24/25.](#)

3. Report from Committees

NOTED the Report from the [Officer Committee.](#)

NOTED the Report from the [Chief Executive Support and Review Committee.](#)

4. Chief Executive's Report

NOTED the report from the Chief Executive, on actions since the last meeting of the Board of Trustees, corporate performance, and emergent priorities.

The Chief Executive presented the report and noted that the current officer team would be leaving at the end of the week.

The Part-time Officers have achieved great work this year, earning several awards.

Candidates have been shortlisted for the Student Rights Advisor role, with interviews scheduled for next week, and the Student Voice Coordinator position will be advertised at the end of the month.

The “Rate Your Landlord” initiative has received over 600 responses. The Housing and Rights areas are being restructured, with collaboration ongoing with the university to develop these changes.

It was reported that the current web/database provider appears to be in financial difficulty and may not remain operational for long; however, as the contract is rolling, the team is already exploring alternative solutions. This issue will become a risk if the system is switched off.

The updated staffing structure, including names, was attached to the report.

5. Finance Report

NOTED the Finance Report to period ten of 2024/2025.

The Head of Central Services presented the report, noting that the financial position at the end of May was better than expected. However, this is likely to reverse once redundancy costs are confirmed in June and July.

The organisation is currently projecting a deficit of around £23k, though this may be lower due to reduced activity in July. This deficit is not a concern, as it is expected to be recovered easily at the start of the next financial year. Cash flow remains stable, with no issues reported, and the next significant outgoing will be £190k for the DUCFS payment to Macmillan.

APPROVED the release of unclaimed funds from expeditions.

The DUCK funds, originally raised to support expeditions for voluntary work, have remained unused since the pandemic halted travel. While some funds related to transport and accommodation were refunded where possible, a balance of £22k remains.

As the Charity Commission discourages organisations from holding unused funds, it was agreed that these should now be put to good use. Of the remaining amount, £12k will be allocated to charity, with the Vice-Chancellor serving as chair of NEPACS, this was seen as a good fit. The remaining £10k will be directed to subsidiary companies to support fundraising activities and associated legal costs. The funds will be moved into unrestricted reserves and used for the agreed purposes.

APPROVED amendments to bank mandates and authorisation limits.

Due to the Director of Communication and Strategy leaving in November, the number of authorised signatories will reduce to two, with the Deputy Chief Executive being added as a replacement. A proposal was also made for the Deputy Chief Executive to deputise for the Chief Executive in his absence. Clarification was provided on signing authority, confirming that new ‘Heads of’ roles will assume the responsibilities previously held by ‘Director’ roles.

Strategic development business

6. Strategic measures and the National Student Survey

APPROVED amendments to Durham SU strategic goals.

The Chief Executive presented an update on the National Student Survey results, noting that the score has performed well this year.

However, there was caution over setting overly ambitious targets that could lead to underperformance in the future. The recommendation is to maintain the current target at

40%, though there was discussion about potentially increasing it to 45% or even 50%. The consensus was to consider what is realistically achievable with current resources, with 50% seen as aspirational but 40% remaining a sensible and achievable goal. The discussion also touched on the impact of the collegiate university structure on scoring, as well as upcoming cuts in student experience areas at the university.

7. Work with the Durham Union Society

APPROVED an offer to the Durham Union Society for collaborative working.

The Chief Executive presented an update following the assembly meeting and said the proposals are considered relatively low risk and would not require significant effort from Durham SU.

Discussion focused on whether pursuing this work aligns with Durham SU's best interests and how progress would be monitored effectively. It was confirmed that no commercial activities, such as the bar 24's, would be taken on.

The Chief Executive emphasised the importance of changing the organisational culture by modelling appropriate ways of addressing issues, acknowledging that while incidents may occur, the key focus should be on how they are managed. There remains a duty to report any illegal, criminal, or safeguarding matters, as covered by existing policies

The need for a long-term approach to addressing recurring cultural issues passed down through successive executive teams was also highlighted, with a recommendation that option 3 (providing services to a Board) be offered to them.

Finally, the optics of participation in events such as Freshers' Fair were discussed, with agreement that this should not be pursued at the current time.

Good governance business

8. Budget 2025/26

APPROVED the Budget 2025/26.

The Head of Central Services presented the budget, noting that there were minimal changes from the version previously brought to the May meeting.

The updated version included the annual Cost-of-Living Award (CoLA) for staff, for approval by the Board. Staff members left the room during the vote.

9. Board Plan 2025/26

APPROVED the Board Plan 2025/26.

Dates for 2025-2027 Board meetings will be sent via email, and confirmed details for the development day in September will be circulated shortly.

10. DUCFS Charity Approval 2026

APPROVED Durham University Charity Fashion Show choice of Charity for the 2026 campaign.

The Head of Community presented the DUCFS chosen charity on fundraising for charity donations, which prompted discussion from the trustees around whether the chosen charity sufficiently aligns with Durham SU's educational remit. Discussion focused on the breadth of

the term “education,” acknowledging that it extends beyond traditional classroom-based learning. Clarification was sought regarding how donated funds can be used, and the importance of clear financial agreements with recipient charities was emphasised.

Trustees also discussed how Durham SU could offer better guidance to encourage fundraising for more local or community-based charities. Concerns were raised about relying on a single charity, and to mitigate this risk, the Board agreed to select a second charity from the shortlist of educational and environmentally focused organisations.

The proposal was APPROVED on the basis of including a second charity in the educational and green sector.

Items for Information

11. Any other urgent business

To NOTE any other urgent business.

The Chair gave thanks to all retiring trustees and officers for their contributions and service.