

DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF 29 MAY 2024

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

In attendance: Gareth Hughes, Jane Whalen, Georgi Lambert, Moitreya Ganguli, Catherine Howells, Oliver Davis, Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

Apologies: Deborah Acheampong

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

1. Opening of the meeting

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

2. Minutes of the previous meeting and actions

APPROVED: minutes of the last meeting on 28 February 2024.

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 results of the Part-Time Officer and student trustee elections were declared on 7 May and there are ongoing elections for the remaining positions.

Assembly meets on 30 May and will consider a motion on the relationship with Durham Union Society (DUS). The motion is perfectly in order, but the decision on commercial bookings would rest with the Chief Executive, who would be guided by the Officer team.

A request for a block grant has been submitted at CPI inflation plus 1% on the 2023/24 grant, with specific requests for funded uplifts to enable us to meet regulatory standards under freedom of speech legislation, grow provision in independent student advice, and better support Part-Time Officers in Faculties, international students, and postgraduate students. Durham University's Strategic Planning Office will now consolidate requests.

The President and Chief Executive continue to engage constructively with Durham University on the matter of support for students affected, directly and indirectly, by the war in Israel/Palestine. Durham now has a protest encampment on Palace Green. The trustees have received an assessment of the relationship with the encampment.

4. Finance Report

NOTED: the Finance Report for the third quarter of 2023/24.

The overall position shows a surplus for the year to date of £37k, which is £17k better than budgeted. This is due to an underspend in activity offsetting the underperformance in Kingsgate. The actions taken in Kingsgate largely have stemmed losses.

Cash flow is good, but funds are artificially higher than usual due to an early grant payment and funds from the Charity Fashion show still in the account.

The trustees asked for a review of the data included in charts, and the presentation of charts, which were becoming difficult to read. Data from the past few years would be sufficient to help trustees understand Durham SU's financial sustainability.

Action: Finance Manager to review the data included in charts and presentation.

Strategic development business

5. Freedom of Speech: A Green Paper

NOTED: the Green Paper and **APPROVED:** New Standing Order G.

The paper was in two parts: the first part is a review of the regulatory framework, and the second part is the draft Code of Practice.

The trustees suggested that a more focused explanation of how Durham SU's values uphold Freedom of Speech may prevent misinterpretation and further work but otherwise supported the Green Paper. It was noted how complex the issue could become, and how important it was to stay focused on what the law required, rather than broader philosophical discussions on freedom of speech.

A new Standing Order G, the student group regulations, was proposed and accepted, further to the Support and Funding Framework. The Standing Order will be presented to the meeting of Assembly on 30 May and creates objective criteria for student group registration.

6. Bringing Student Together Presentation

RECEIVED: a presentation on student groups and their contribution to strategy.

Good governance business

7. Annual Planning

NOTED: progress on annual planning.

The plan contributes to each of Durham SU's strategic goals and details the proposed priority work to June 2025 as areas in which Durham SU will focus resources next year. The plan is used for project and budget management, delivery and reporting across the team on a rolling basis within the year.

Once core costs are accounted for, Durham SU is left with a £75k strategic delivery budget, of which £50k is intended to be grants or funds to allow student led projects, with a process to be agreed for awarding in year. This will be an experiment but will allow delivery in line with strategy and values.

8. Staff Engagement Survey

NOTED: the results of the Staff Engagement Survey.

Durham SU had undertaken a staff engagement survey, which is run biannually. Since the last engagement survey in March 2022 several improvements have been made to performance management systems, improved contractual terms (core contract hours and annual leave), and there will be a proposed 28-hour work week trial in Summer 2024

The paper presented headline analysis of the key information and trends from the 2024 survey. This year the response rate of 79% (52 people out of a possible 66) was a good achievement as in previous years student staff contribution had been lower. The employee engagement index score, derived from 'I would recommend this organisation as a good place to work' stands at 75% overall this year (67% career staff, 84% student staff).

Results will be annualised and have already been shared with the career staff team, with focus on the key challenges in the organisation: Communication (62%), Engagement (63%) and Leadership (60%), Service (63%). A small working group will be brought together to look further into the challenges, lead by the Administration Manager and the Director of Campaigns, which will feed into the development of the People Action Plan.

9. Data Protection and Information Governance Review

APPROVED: the data protection and information governance review.

In 2024/25 Durham SU proposes an external gap analysis review of our data protection and information security instead of an annual assurance report. Following review, the data protection policy and student privacy notice will be updated. Other priorities from the recommendations of the review will be brought for agreement by the Board.

10. Pension Contribution Policy

APPROVED: the pension contribution policy.

Durham SU proposed to amend its policy on partial contribution matching on employee pension Additional Voluntary Contributions. The amendment allows for the savings the organisations make through National Insurance reductions from an employee paying AVC's to their pension fund to be added to the employee's pension fund.

11. Appointment of Auditors

APPROVED: the appointment of the auditor.

It had been six years since the last review, and it was agreed therefore this was an appropriate time to conduct a review.

Durham SU, represented by the Finance Manager and Anna Robinson, collaborated with both Newcastle SU and Northumbria SU on a joint tender for audit services and recommended the appointment of Armstrong Watson as auditors.

12. Appointment of Lay Trustees

APPROVED: the appointment of Helen Cutting and Emma Clarke as lay trustees.

A panel of trustees interviewed candidates for appointment as lay trustees on 28 May 2024. Rob Drury, Haf Serajee, and Freddy Fossey-Warren met and recommended Helen Cutting and Emma Clark be appointed as lay trustees.

Items for Information

13. Any Other Business

The Chair noted that this was the last meeting for the current Officer and Student Trustees and thanked them for their contributions throughout the year and welcomed the new Officer and Student Trustees to the Board, who were attending as observers and would officially join the Board at the next meeting in July.

The Chair tabled the Chief Executive's Annual Review 2023 and apologised for the late circulation. He would welcome any comments by email.

