

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING 26 MAY 2021

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

In attendance: Gareth Hughes, Kirsty Morrison, Martin Horrocks, Katie Shaw, Lauren Hodgson (minutes)

Apologies: Megan Wishart, Ola Wojciechowska, Kathryn Ellison

Usual business items

1. OPENING OF MEETING

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

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

Accepted: the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021.

An updated version of the action log was provided, with new and completed actions.

3. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

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

The Chair of Fundraising Committee presented an update from their last meeting and stated that activity levels remained very low. The strike fund money provided to support academic societies is £90k underspent, but with the Universities consent will be rolled into next year. Student Group grants are also underspent in a much smaller way, which should give a small backstop for next year. The Committee approved an application from DUCK to use Hopin as an online event forum as a trial and also approved the use of the Just Giving donation platform as a trial by the Fashion Show.

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

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Received: the Chief Executive's report on Durham SU's performance since the last meeting.

Durham SU is operating under the assumption that Government easement of regulation will continue, and are working towards step 4 of the Roadmap, with contingencies for a potential delay from 21 June 2021 to a later date. Commercial activity will resume and it is likely that a reduced offer will be available from the end of May, which at least brings the social space back into student use.

It was queried if there was a plan in place for staff returning to offices and what this would look like. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Director of Services was leading on staff return to Dunelm House and is looking at flexible working and how this can work for the organisation as well as staff. This will be trailed from July to October to see what works best ahead of returning for the start of the new academic year.

A new Vice-Chancellor has been appointed to succeed Professor Stuart Corbridge. Professor Karen O'Brien will join Durham in January 2022 and Professor Antony Long will be interim Vice-Chancellor until then.

The Staff Engagement Survey 2021 has reported. A full analysis will be provided to People and Culture Committee, who will review the full analysis and agree an action plan.

5. FINANCE REPORT

Received: the Finance Report and management accounts to period 9, April 2021.

The Finance Manager presented the report and stated that the accounts had very little movement since the last report in February, as expected. Overall, unrestricted reserves at the end of April are at £246k, reassuringly close to the reserves target level at £252k. This is likely to be maintained until the end of term, depending on the success of commercial activity. Cash is at a healthy level and there is little movement in credit or debtors.

The Chair added that the management team had done excellent work to keep the organisation stable over the past 12 months, and the organisation moves out of the pandemic in as solid financial position as could be expected.

Good governance items

6. APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR

Considered: the appointment of a Chair of the Board.

Chris Nash left the meeting for this item due to expressing interest in the vacant Chair position. The Board considered options for appointing a new Chair and noted that Chris Nash had expressed an interest in serving as Chair. This would be his first appointment, and he had discussed development and support needs with the current Chair and the Chief Executive.

The Board appointed Chris Nash to succeed Anthony Baker as Chair of the Board.

7. DEMOCRACY REVIEW

Received: a report on parameters for the reform of Assembly.

The paper was presented by the Director of Democracy and Strategy and the Opportunities Officer, who outlined the proposed schedule of work to address different aspects of Durham SU's democratic framework. The work sought to effectively address issues raised from the MiraGold Democracy Review. Proposed changes to Assembly have been developed through a series of modelling workshops with students. This presentation supported the trustees to engage with thinking and advise on any concerns that would prevent straightforward approval of amendments to the Standing Orders.

The changes will be presented to Assembly in June in bite-size motions, so students can decide to make wholesale or specific changes to Assembly. New Standing Orders will be commissioned and proposed to the Board. Work will be carried out over the summer to look at how students engage and raise issues, as well as looking at academic representation.

It was questioned how members of Assembly elected to represent students as College members not being elected through JCR's would affect the relationship between JCRs and Durham SU.

The Opportunities Officer clarified that there had been a proposal to include an amendment to have representation elected through JCR's as this is currently not the case and the point needs to be made that the Standing Orders currently state colleges and not JCRs.

The Board considered the proposed schedule for changes to the democratic framework and discussed the proposed changes to Assembly.

Strategic development items

8. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Advised: on the planning objectives for Durham SU in 2021/2022

The Chief Executive stated that the objectives set out previous discussions of the Board and had been split into two parts, doing things for students, and organisation development:

- Implement a new planning and delivery cycle.
- Champion the student interest in education, everyday life and communities.
- Articulate the student interest in the culture at Durham.
- Carefully manage finances and re-establish low-risk trading services.
- Invest in strategic communications infrastructure.

- Develop a strategic framework for delivery from 2022 to 2027.

It was suggested that the objectives should be reordered to prioritise student-facing activities. The trustees also noted that it was good that Durham SU is looking to build back carefully and not do too much, too fast. It will take a long time to get back to full capacity.

The Chief Executive added that work over the summer with incoming Officers would create an action plan which will then go to Assembly in October. Work will start from there, rather than having the plan already in place before the incoming Officers take post.

9. BUDGET PLANNING

Noted: the grant award.

Agreed: the approach to budget planning.

The Durham University Chief Financial Officer had provided information on the grant award, which had been approved by University Finance Committee but is currently still awaiting approval by University Council. The grant award will be a three-year agreement of £1m, increasing by RPI inflation each year. This is a very good increase from £880k in 2020 and £920k in 2019. This does not include strategic communications resources, which had been agreed in principle, and will be additional funding. As part of the agreement a paper will be prepared Durham SU's engagement with the National Student Survey, with an action plan expected by the Durham University Provost's Board.

The Board noted the grant bid process and agreed the approach to budget planning.

Information items

10. STUDENT GROUP FUNDING

Received: a paper on student group funding, and the risk presented by activity planned in May and June 2021.

11. CHARITY UPDATE PRESENTATION (WOMBLE BOND DICKINSON)

Received: a charity update presentation, from the 're: build Britain' webinar hosted by Womble Bond Dickinson in April 2021.