

DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 26 JUNE 2019

Members present

Anthony Baker, Clare Powne, George Walker, Ben Zealley, Saul Cahill, David Evans, Charlie Walker, Sam Johnson-Audini, Oliver Colling (by Skype)

In attendance

Gareth Hughes, Kirsty Morrison, Georgina Lambert, Martin Horrocks, Laura Wilkinson (minutes), Shari Fearon (Meet a Member of Staff only), Rebecca Henderson (Assembly Report only)

Observing

Tom Pymmer, Amie Key, Poppy Azmi, Jess Dunning, Chris Nash (External trustee applicant), Kathryn Fraser, Cate O'Brien, Jess Madden (by Skype)

Apologies

Meg Haskins, Kate McIntosh, Estia Ryan

Notification of Any other Business or conflicts of interests

None

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

Meet a member of staff

Shari Fearon spoke about her role as a Receptionist and how varied her job can be: from binding, signposting to the Advice Service, room bookings, and general student enquiries. SF has thoroughly enjoyed working in the role this year and is returning next year. There is a great team on Reception who have formed a new system to work more efficiently.

GW stated that the Staff Engagement Survey feedback from student staff was very positive, and asked if there was any training and development that the SU could provide. SF thought the training received in May and September had been good, and next year they were looking at making a guide and implementing a buddy system. The group chat that the team have had also been very helpful throughout the year.

Minutes from the last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the last meeting were approved with a small amendment to the wording of the National Societies Awards section to clarify recipients

GH updated the Board that Standing Order K had now been deleted: the Board Committees are as resolved at last meeting, which will be implemented as from August.

Chief Executive Report

GH was very proud that Durham SU had achieved the Quality Students' Union with a 'Very Good' assessment and he would collect the award with GW in London in July.

80% of student groups were through registration stage 1, and the team are working through any irregularities. Three unratified associations have submitted applications which are being worked through. DE asked if the Association election turnout would be published and GH responded that there was no reason why it couldn't be.

KMo read a statement from JM at her request, which raised concerns that the relationships between Associations and the SU was continuing to deteriorate. There had been confusion around the

implementation of the student group changes and recent elections, with Associations not being consulted on the process.

GH suggested that it was perhaps inappropriate to discuss 'the Associations' as a homogenous collective of student groups or activists. There was no common view among the Associations and JM should perhaps present singular opinion as such. The Board has been previously appraised of risk associated with recognition of Associations, had determined a strategy, and staff were now acting on that basis.

SJA stated that they were a current Association President and they agree with GH remarks: there had been no collective discussion between Associations and there was no such collective position on the relationship with Durham SU.

AB reminded the Board that discussions about the risk associated with the student group change process has been thorough, and the trustees had collectively asked the Chief Executive to implement the agreed strategy.

TP asked if three new groups who wished to be recognised as Associations would be considered by the Board within any defined timeframe. GH responded that the groups had been given all information and support necessary to present a low risk proposal, guided by the model student group documents and any delay was not due to Durham SU process or staff; as soon as the three student groups have acted within the described parameters, he would assess the risk and present a proposal to the relevant bodies. There was no deadline from Durham SU's point of view, as proposals come from student initiative and the organization would respond promptly.

GW asked for an update on the GMB meetings with student staff. GH had just received an email from GMB today and he would update the Board as soon as he had further information.

Finance Report

MHo presented the report noting nothing of concern, Durham SU had done slightly better than expected. There were no questions.

Assembly Report

GH introduced the report, and asked trustees if they had any questions or comments regarding the first policy: *'Supporting the fight for marriage equality in Northern Ireland'*.

SJA thought it may be helpful to have guidelines for groups that wish to raise money for other students. GH advised that Durham SU can raise money for other organisations, but the trustees would need to be satisfied that in doing so and at point of donation the activity furthered Durham SU's objectives. The Board accepted the policy, and asked for further communication with student groups.

The Board discussed the second policy: *'Support for direct action against rising accommodation fees'*.

AB was of the view that the risk assessment was useful, and the decision should be made by Board at the point the tactic was considered necessary. GW agreed that it was higher risk activity, and asked to know more about the process of having further risk assessment. GL would lead the assessment process, which would be a bespoke process based on the Durham Risk Policy as Durham SU hasn't undertaken any of these in the recent past.

GH believed that alternative tactics may be more appropriate to consider before using last resort options, but Assembly had helpfully stated its view that the last resort option was within its appetite. CW asked what the risk was if other student organisations decided to follow this tactic and GH replied that there was little financial or governance risk, as controls over group activities in this instance were clear. There was, however, significant stakeholder management risks which would need to be considered.

AB concluded that the Board were content with the policy but would wish a further paper to come to the Board if it was judged to be a tactic that Durham SU would deploy in campaigning.

Annual Plan and Budget

MHo and KMo presented the Annual Plan and Budget, which set out activity to make the strategy strands work over the next 3 years. The budget includes baseline costs such as salary. Developments in commercial income were built in and the anticipated surplus would be £38k. GH confirmed that the 2019/2020 grant has been agreed with Durham University.

The plan has been broken down into projects to make it more transparent and managers would now plot out the year ahead, with a timeline of when projects will be completed, and how to report them back to Board. Staff objectives will be clearly aligned to the projects.

DE asked for more information on the Kingsgate commercial modelling. MHo stated that he believed the 100k turnover was a reasonable target. The addition of two Duty Managers to payroll and a continuing commitment to the Foundation Living Wage mean there wouldn't be too much surplus to start with, but the plan was to keep growing from those foundation. MHo anticipated a 15% drop in Riverside sales due to decreased lecture traffic in Dunelm House.

DE asked whether the money in the budget to improve binding services was enough. KM advised that they are looking at how we deliver the whole reception service, but the investment was considered appropriate at this time.

The Board approved the Annual Plan and Budget.

Community Strategy

GH advised the Board that this strategy outlined the base values and objectives, and a year of purposeful activity against a vision for student life in Durham. The intention was to bring the strategy and resource into the mainstream planning from 2020/2021. Three of the Community Strategy strands align closely to the principal Durham SU strategy, and this document provided meaningful focus rather than an addition or deviation from the original plan.

CP stated that it was an excellent document, and very positive, and asked how it would be promoted to students. GW would lead on this activity and prioritise engagement with University colleagues and broader student communication. AB was keen to ensure the University bought into the strategy too, to enable partnership work.

The Board approved the Community Strategy.

A discussion paper on common rooms

GH summarised the paper: the key question for him was really whether the Board thought the success and long-term health of common rooms were Durham SU's business. The officers and senior staff had come to the conclusion that the only possible response was positive. Common Rooms are what makes Durham special, and the University developments have inadvertently made it very difficult for them to do well.

GH was confident that Durham SU could provide a regulatory framework, more sympathetic to student organisations and their nature than the University Durham Student Organisation framework, but trust between Common Rooms and Durham SU was essential.

JD asked how this would regulate independent common rooms and GH advised that at the minute the options probably only appropriate for DSO Common Rooms. JD asked if they were at risk of getting excluded, and whether there was an opportunity for them to come on board in the future. GH had already checked and they had no interest in any event.

DE stated that MCRs could be an interesting test case as they seem to have even less support. CW advised that he was intending to attend an MCR PresComm meeting to start the discussion with them.

AB asked what the University would think of Durham SU's involvement. GW advised that there has been a growing dissatisfaction with DSO framework from student leaders. The University doesn't have the capacity or capability to support student leaders appropriately. Initial conversations had been cautious but not hostile.

AB asked how likely it was that a sizeable number of Common Rooms would want to be part of a first wave. GH predicted that three or four may be interested, and some have already asked for the conversation.

BZ had been part of DSO framework discussions in College, and could confirm that there is a lot of dissatisfaction. He felt that a few common rooms would be happy to move over for a good offer.

AB asked about the main challenges, and GH advised that many were operational, in the sense of time to prepare ideas and consult before the idea ran away with itself. There was also a sizable barrier in convincing democratic communities to enter this arrangement.

CP thought the proposal would be better supported and gather momentum if some of the Common Rooms were involved in the writing/development of proposals. GH replied that the discussion paper had been developed with the chair of JCR PresComm, and during the summer would be considered at the Presidential Residential run for Common Room and Team Durham Leaders. They would have further opportunity to input.

CW asked what the next steps would be if approved. GH was meeting with the trainer for Presidential Residential tomorrow to discuss how best to introduce the concept to student leaders. There will also be a further conversation with University leaders including the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Colleges and Student Experience). He would also include this in the next catch up with the lawyers to help prepare possible options there.

AB asked how quickly this might move forward and GH thought it would be reasonably pacey. A few Common Rooms which have said that they wish to leave DSO framework now want to exit during 2019/2020.

The Board asked GH to take this idea forward for further discussion and any appropriate decisions to be brought back to the Board at January 2020 meeting.

Appointment of Trustees

The Board approved the recommendation of Governance and Appointments Committee, and appointed Chris Nash as a trustee, to a term of office ending in July 2022.

AOB

The observers left, other than Kathryn Fraser and Cate O'Brien