



the DURHAM UNION

MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 11TH MARCH 2026

THE READING ROOM, 24 NORTH BAILEY

The meeting commenced at 13:54; the Secretary is taking the minutes.

Item One: Welcome and Greetings

The President opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

Item Two: Report of the President

The President began by expressing his satisfaction with the term and noted that he had recently come down with an illness. He encouraged members to attend the final events of the term and thanked the Committee for their support throughout his presidency.

Questions:

Will Pugh asked whether the President had enjoyed his term.

Mr Doherty replied that the presidency was “like the most toxic relationship I have ever been in”. He stated that the best part of the role was chairing debates, while the worst aspect was the administrative workload. He wished the President-Elect luck and added that the Union had been a significant part of his life.

Muhammad Khan asked who the President's favourite speaker had been.
Mr Doherty replied that it was Leo Varadkar.

Reuben Fisher asked what the President's favourite moment had been.
Mr Doherty replied that it was hosting his parents at the Leo Varadkar address.

Muhammad Khan asked who the President's favourite student speaker had been.
Mr Doherty jokingly replied, "Certainly not you."

Item Three: Report of the Custodian

The Custodian noted that there had been several "teething issues" while operating without a full-time Bar Manager. She expressed satisfaction with the growth of the 24s Instagram account.

Ms Hunt reported that Peroni was being introduced on tap, and that the President's Drink initiative would soon be launched. She also noted that the benches in the garden would be repainted.

Questions:

Tobias Gumm asked what Ms Hunt's favourite element of the new collage in 24 North Bailey was.

Ms Hunt replied that it was the cutout of Durham Cathedral.

Item Four: Report of the Equalities Officer

The Equalities Officer reported that this term had seen the first introduction of Active Listening Training within the Society.

Mr Bono also highlighted the Society's engagement with several feminist societies during the International Women's Day debate, and confirmed that sanitary products would soon be introduced at 24 North Bailey.

"Onwards and upwards!"

Item Five: Report of the President-Elect

The President-Elect, Mr Edward Tye, stated that “Easter Term will be absolutely massive.”

He outlined several upcoming addresses and debates, including appearances by Baroness Hale, Ian Proud, Laila Cunningham, and Ilan Pappé, as well as debates on the BBC, the modern left, the Reformation, and Kashmiri independence.

Questions

Joshua Doherty asked whether the President-Elect was excited.

Mr Tye replied that his feelings “change twice a day”, but that at present he was excited.

Blake Leonard of Hatfield College asked which events Mr Tye was most looking forward to hosting.

Mr Tye replied that he was particularly looking forward to the Reformation debate and the Baroness Hale address.

Will Pugh asked how flexible the President-Elect’s bedtime was.

Mr Tye replied that it was “very flexible”, noting that he was currently going to bed at around 3:00am.

Item Six: Report of the Returning Officer

The Returning Officer, Mr Adam McIntyre, outlined several rulings made during the Michaelmas Presidential Election.

These included:

- amendments required to campaign manifestos
- a campaign poster ruled out of order (and added to case law)
- amendments to a campaign video
- corrections to spelling errors in campaign materials

Mr McIntyre confirmed that the Michaelmas Presidential Election result had been approved as:

Questions:

Maria Hunt asked which of the video-game themed campaign posters had brought the Society most into disrepute.

Mr McIntyre replied that it was the Fortnite poster.

Fran Greenhalgh asked whether the issue related to video games generally or to specific games.

Mr McIntyre replied that it was a combination of both.

Will Pugh asked whether the Rules Committee knew how to have fun.

Mr McIntyre replied that it did, but not when it had to be serious.

Muhammad Khan asked when Rules Committee case law would be published.

Mr McIntyre replied that this would take place over the Easter break.

Item Seven: Election of the Alumni Officer

Two valid nominations:

- Harry Murgatroyd of Trevelyan College, proposed by Maria Hunt of St. Aidan's College, seconded by Reuben Fisher of University College.
- Muhammad Khan of Hatfield College, proposed by Wali Sultan, St. Aidan's College, seconded by Maya Shahzad of St. Cuthbert's Society.

Harry Murgatroyd

Mr Murgatroyd began by stating that it was an honour to stand for the position of Alumni Officer, which he described as a role carrying significant responsibility in maintaining and strengthening the Society's relationships with its alumni.

He highlighted his experience serving on the House Committee, noting that the role had required him to manage logistical responsibilities within the Reading Room and to build strong relationships with members and officers across the Society. He argued that these experiences had given him a practical understanding of how the Union operates on a day-to-day basis.

Mr Murgatroyd thanked the outgoing Alumni Officer, Mr Oliver Hughes, for his work during the past year, stating that he left “very big shoes to fill”. He expressed his intention to continue the momentum that had been built through the Alumni Mentorship Scheme, and stated that he would work to ensure that the scheme continued to expand.

Mr Murgatroyd also referenced his experience working for a year in the office of his local Member of Parliament, where he had been responsible for managing correspondence and maintaining relationships with constituents and stakeholders. He argued that this experience had given him a strong understanding of professional communication and stakeholder management.

Looking ahead, Mr Murgatroyd stated that he wished to ensure that the benefits of the Society’s alumni network were not limited to members of the General Committee. Instead, he proposed expanding opportunities for ordinary members of the Society to engage with alumni through workshops, networking events, and mentorship opportunities.

He concluded by stating that he would remain open to collaboration with officers and committees across the Society, and that he would be honoured to receive the support of the General Committee.

Muhammad Khan

Mr Khan began by emphasising the importance of the Alumni Officer in ensuring that members of the Society remain connected to those who had previously been part of the Union.

He stated that, if elected, he would undertake a significant revamp of the Alumni Mentorship Scheme, setting himself the goal of recruiting at least fifteen additional mentors within his first term in office. He stated that this could be achieved through targeted outreach and sustained engagement with alumni.

Mr Khan also proposed introducing a digital “Alumni Portal”, which he described as a centralised system through which alumni and mentees could communicate. He stated that the portal could incorporate artificial intelligence tools to assist in matching mentors and mentees, thereby ensuring that the allocation process was not determined solely by the discretion of the Alumni Officer.

In addition, Mr Khan proposed targeting alumni from the 2015–2020 cohorts, whom he believed might be particularly receptive to making micro-donations to support the Society.

Mr Khan highlighted his experience within the Society, including his service on the Secretary's Committee, where he had taken minutes for both a General Committee meeting and a speaker address. He also noted his work on the President's Committee, where he had assisted in securing several speakers for the current and upcoming terms. He further referenced his collaboration with the Equalities Committee on a survey of Society members.

He concluded by stating that he was currently working with the President-Elect on the upcoming Kashmir debate, and reiterated his belief that the Alumni Officer should play an active role in connecting the Society's past and present members.

Questions:

Oliver Hughes asked both candidates how they would manage the GDPR implications associated with handling sensitive personal information relating to alumni and mentees.

Mr Khan responded that communications would be managed directly through the Alumni Officer and that his proposed Alumni Portal would provide a secure and centralised platform for these communications.

Mr Murgatroyd stated that he had significant experience working under GDPR constraints during his time working in Westminster and that he was confident in his ability to handle sensitive information responsibly.

Tobias Gumm asked how each candidate intended to secure greater support and engagement from alumni.

Mr Murgatroyd replied that personal relationships and connections would be an important starting point. He argued that the Society must remain true to its history, values, and traditions, which would naturally encourage alumni to remain involved.

Mr Khan responded that he believed networking and outreach were key tools in engaging alumni. He suggested that cold calling and direct contact could be

effective methods of reconnecting with alumni, particularly recent graduates. He also proposed organising additional alumni events to maintain engagement.

Adam McIntyre asked the candidates whether they had any views on the Alumni Advisory Board.

Mr Khan stated that he was not yet fully familiar with the Board but committed to learning more about its role if elected.

Mr Murgatroyd replied that maintaining strong links with the Advisory Board would be important and stated that he had a strong record of learning quickly when taking on new responsibilities.

Tobias Gumm asked how each candidate would approach engaging alumni who had “gone cold”.

Mr Murgatroyd suggested that event-specific outreach, such as workshops or professional events, could encourage alumni to re-engage with the Society.

Mr Khan stated that engagement should begin within the Union itself, arguing that the Society’s reputation and atmosphere played a key role in alumni willingness to return. He reiterated that his proposed Alumni Portal could also facilitate renewed engagement.

Will Pugh asked about the potential financial costs associated with the candidates’ proposals.

Mr Khan responded that many of the initiatives he had proposed would have minimal costs. He added that he owned a software company and stated that he would personally fund the development of the proposed digital portal.

Mr Murgatroyd replied that the policies he had outlined would not involve significant costs beyond those associated with specific events.

Oliver Hughes asked how each candidate would encourage greater financial donations from alumni.

Mr Murgatroyd replied that maintaining the Society's values and traditions would naturally encourage alumni to give back over time, and that fundraising should be seen as a collective effort rather than the sole responsibility of the Alumni Officer.

Mr Khan agreed that the Society's values were central to encouraging donations, but emphasised the potential importance of micro-donations and increased alumni engagement through events.

Voting:

Harry Murgatroyd: 19

Muhammad Khan: 19

3 spoiled ballots.

The Returning Officer announced that the election had resulted in a tie. He informed the Committee that he had consulted both candidates following the vote. It was therefore determined that the election would be re-run at the next meeting of the General Committee.

Item Eight: Ratification of the Debate Competitions Officer

Nomination from the Debates Committee:

- Divvesh Kumaravel of Van Mildert College.

Mr Kumaravel introduced himself to the Committee, noting that he had been involved in debating for six years. He stated that he had previously convened two debate tournaments in his home country and had experience in managing competitive debating events.

He also informed the Committee that he had already begun working on preparations for Durham Schools, the Society's major annual schools debating competition.

Voting:

Callum Hendry of St Chad's College proposed that the ratification be taken on a general aye, seconded by Muhammad Khan of Hatfield College.

The ratification was taken on a general aye.

Item Nine: Election of the Assistant Custodian.

Two valid nominations:

- Vatsa Dubey of St. Mary's College, proposed by William Pugh of South College, seconded by Theo Sanguinazzi of John Snow College.
- Blake Leonard of Hatfield College, proposed by William Haworth of St. Cuthbert's Society, seconded by Vardan Umbreyan of St. Cuthbert's Society.

Vatsa Dubey

Mr Dubey stated that 24 North Bailey had all the potential required to be the best student bar in Durham. He explained that he had worked since his arrival at the Union to encourage more people to attend events and spend time in the building.

He argued that 24 North Bailey should become better known beyond the Society itself, and suggested that social media engagement, particularly through Instagram, could play a key role in promoting the bar.

Mr Dubey proposed several ideas to increase engagement, including themed competitions between the President and President-Elect, as well as promotional initiatives such as offering a free drink after a certain number of purchases.

He concluded by stating that the unique character of 24 North Bailey should be emphasised and that the bar should continue to function as the social heart of the Union.

Blake Leonard

Mr Leonard began by stating that he believed 24 North Bailey should host more events specifically centred around the bar. While he praised existing initiatives such as the Pub Quiz, he suggested introducing additional activities such as karaoke nights.

He also emphasised the importance of improving promotion, suggesting that the Society's Secretary's Committee, House Committee, and Social Committee could all assist in amplifying publicity through social media.

Mr Leonard proposed expanding the range of drinks available on tap, particularly with an emphasis on real ales, and suggested exploring partnerships with local breweries.

Finally, he proposed that the Reading Room could potentially be rented separately, rather than requiring the full hire of 24 North Bailey, as well as emphasising the importance of 24s being the home of the Union.

Questions:

Maria Hunt asked both candidates whether they had any prior experience working in a bar.

Mr Dubey replied that he had not previously worked in a bar, but jokingly stated that he had certainly spent considerable time in them.

Mr Leonard replied that he had briefly worked in a bar for approximately two weeks. He stated that it had given him a basic understanding of bar service and customer interactions.

Joshua Doherty noted that both candidates were known to enjoy a drink, and asked whether they would be willing to assist with door duties when necessary.

Mr Leonard replied that although he had a busy schedule, he would be willing to assist with such duties when required.

Mr Dubey replied that he already spent a considerable amount of time at 24 North Bailey and joked that many of his social plans already revolved around being in the bar. He stated that he would therefore be very willing to assist with operational duties whenever needed.

Will Pugh asked the candidates what their "dream pint" in 24 North Bailey would be.

Mr Leonard replied that his preferred drink would be Timothy Taylor's Landlord.

Mr Dubey replied that he would choose Asahi.

Reuben Fisher asked whether the candidates believed the bar should introduce mocktails and other non-alcoholic drink options.

Mr Dubey replied that he supported the introduction of mocktails and believed they would make the bar more inclusive and appealing to a wider range of members.

Mr Leonard agreed, stating that there was clearly demand for more non-alcoholic options and suggesting that the bar should also expand its selection of alcohol-free beers.

Ava Charlton asked both candidates to state their “chop time”.

Mr Leonard replied that his chop time was approximately six seconds.

Mr Dubey replied that his chop time was approximately eight seconds.

Alexander Tonkin asked each candidate to identify a drink that they would not introduce to the bar, and to explain their reasoning.

Mr Dubey replied that he personally disliked IPAs.

Mr Leonard replied that he would not introduce Bud Light.

Voting:

Vatsa Dubey: 25

Blake Leonard: 9

RON: 2

Vatsa Dubey is duly elected as Assistant Custodian of the Durham Union Society.

Item Ten: Constitutional Amendment I - Publication of Society Minutes - Proposed by Oliver Cox of Trevelyan College, Seconded by Adam McIntyre of University College

Max Vara of Van Mildert college is taking the minutes.

Mr Cox explained that the amendment would formalise the publication of meeting minutes, noting that the policy formed part of the Society's EDI Plan.

Mr McIntyre added that the amendment simply formalised existing practice within the Society.

Voting:

Ayes: 23

Noes: 8

The amendment was passed.

Item Eleven: Ratification of the Welfare Officer

Nomination from the Standing Committee:

- Abigail Rowland of St. Aidan's College.

Ms Rowland introduced herself to the Committee and stated that she wished to serve as a non-judgemental point of contact for members of the Society. She explained that she would hold office hours, maintain communication through the Welfare Officer email address, and work closely with the Equalities Committee.

She also noted that she was looking forward to completing Nightline training.

Questions:

Will Pugh asked whether the Puppy Welfare Social would be returning.

Ms Rowland replied that she was personally more of a cat person, but that the event might return in the future.

Voting:

Adam McIntyre of University College proposed that the ratification be taken on a general aye, seconded by [NOT RECORDED].

The ratification was taken on a general aye.

Item Eleven: Any Other Business

Substantive Motion:

- This House Condemns the behaviour of Mark Hawksworth and would recommend that the Trustees revoke his membership.
 - Proposed by the Standing Committee, seconded by Adam McIntyre of University College.

Jeremy Wang of University College took the Chair.

Blake Leonard of Hatfield College is taking the minutes.

Mr McIntyre opened by explaining that the motion was intended to serve as a formal recommendation from the General Committee to the Society's Trustees. He clarified that the General Committee itself does not possess the authority to revoke the membership of any individual, and that such authority rests solely with the Trustees. The purpose of the motion, he stated, was therefore to formally express the Committee's view on the matter and to recommend that the Trustees consider revoking the membership of Mr Hawksworth..

Molly Purcell described an incident that had occurred during the International Women's Day debate on feminism held the previous Friday, during which Mr Hawksworth reportedly removed a piece of paper from the lap of a female attendee during the debate. She further stated that, during the Q&A section of the debate, Mr Hawksworth delivered an impromptu speech in which he argued that the sexes were not equal.

Mr McIntyre then provided additional context by outlining several incidents that had previously been reported to Union officers. These included an occasion in which Mr Hawksworth had argued in favour of racial segregation during a discussion in the Reading Room, as well as an incident in which he allegedly

threatened Mr McIntyre with an “armed militia” after being refused entry to 24s last term.

The President reiterated that the motion under consideration would not itself result in the removal of Mr Hawksworth’s membership, but would instead represent a recommendation that the Trustees consider taking such action if they deemed it appropriate following their review.

The Custodian encouraged members of the Society who had witnessed or experienced concerning behaviour to submit written statements to assist with the ongoing review.

Voting:

Ayes: 30

Noes: 1

2 spoiled ballots

The motion was passed.

Following the substantive motion, the Social Secretary encouraged people to come to the social later that evening.

Will Pugh: Does the winner get a kiss?

Joshua Doherty: “Keep it in the pants Mr Pugh”.

The President asked that everyone come to General Committee photos following the meeting of the General Committee.

The President thanked everyone for their support throughout the term.

The Committee passed a motion of thanks to Mr Doherty.

The meeting was adjourned at 15:30.