



the DURHAM UNION

MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 21ST JANUARY 2026

LOCATION: THE READING ROOM, 24 NORTH BAILEY

The meeting commenced at 14:08; the Secretary is taking the minutes.

Item One: Welcome and Greetings

The President opened the meeting and welcomed members of the General Committee.

Item Two: Returning Officer's Preamble

The Returning Officer introduced himself and outlined the rules, expectations, and general procedures governing General Committee meetings.

During this item, Edward Tye asked how to spell “aye”, to which the Returning Officer responded that it is spelled “A-Y-E”.

Item Three: President's Report

The President ceded the Chair to the Treasurer.

The President invited members to consult the term card should they have any questions regarding the term's schedule. He outlined the upcoming events for the week, including an address from Will Greenwood and a debate on assisted dying.

The President noted that there had been some issues with ball ticketing, and further outlined his ongoing street interview initiative.

The President also described the new Reading Room entry policy on event nights, stating that entry would be limited to speakers, those attending the dinner, those who asked questions or gave floor speeches, and officers with one guest each.

The President encouraged greater attendance at events by members of General Committee and urged members to sign up for door duty, describing it as “great fun”.

Item Four: Sponsorship Report

The Sponsorship Officer presented a report on her work over the previous year. She stated that total sponsorship secured amounted to approximately £8,000, with a further £4,000 expected. She noted that a major contributor had been the John Locke Institute.

She further reported that Waterhouse Pub had agreed to provide weekly provisions, including five complimentary beverages to be used as incentives for floor speeches. Manuscript Maps were thanked for providing multiple raffle prizes, and

She also noted that Chinese food had been secured for the Lunar New Year social in Epiphany 2024, and £400 worth of champagne was secured for the ball in Easter 2025.

The Sponsorship Officer stated that the sponsorship brochure had been revived and that twelve law firms had been approached for potential sponsorship. She concluded by expressing that she looked forward to working with the next Sponsorship Officer.

Note from the Secretary - thank you to Pia Comer for your service to the Society and the role of Sponsorship Officer over the last year.

Item Five: Speakers Secretary Report

The Speakers Secretary expressed overall satisfaction with Epiphany Term, noting that six debates and one mini-varsity have been arranged. She highlighted the wide range of debate topics and her intention to avoid repetition in motions.

The Speakers Secretary expressed personal dissatisfaction with gender disparity among speakers and urged the President's Committee to prioritise securing more female speakers. She also noted that both Barnard Castle School and Durham Sixth Form Centre would be visiting the Union this term.

Item Six: Ratification of the Deputy Steward

Nomination from the Steward:

- Harry Murgatroyd of Trevelyan College.

Mr Murgatroyd stated that it was an honour and a pleasure to speak to General Committee for the first time. He described his experience on House Committee as highly fulfilling, particularly highlighting the networking opportunities and the organisational and logistical aspects of the role. He emphasised that House Committee sits “at the very centre of the Union’s activities” and argued that the smooth running of House Committee is essential to the success of events and the wider functioning of the Society.

Mr Murgatroyd further stated that he believed he possessed the “grit and knowledge” required to manage a new intake of House Committee members effectively. He cited his previous experience working in Parliament, where he had been involved in organising events and conferences, as evidence of his organisational competence and familiarity with large-scale logistical operations.

Tobias Gumm asked Mr Murgatroyd what his favourite aspect of being on House Committee was.

Mr Murgatroyd replied that his favourite aspect was “the people, and the organised chaos”, explaining that House Committee members are required to work collaboratively under pressure and that there is a strong culture of mutual support, where “everyone mucks in”.

Oliver Cox of Trevelyan College proposed that the ratification be taken on a general aye, which was seconded by Adam McIntyre of University College.

The ratification of Harry Murgatroyd as Deputy Steward was taken on a general aye.

Item Seven: Constitutional Amendment I (Past Presidents) - Proposed by Adam McIntyre of University College, Seconded by Joshua Doherty of Stephenson College.

The President ceded the Chair to the Treasurer.

Mr McIntyre outlined that the amendment sought to restrict the ability of Past Presidents in residence to endorse or support candidates in elections, arguing that such involvement constituted undue political influence. He noted that by Easter Term 2027 there would be four Past Presidents in residence.

The President Emeritus stated that the President Emeritus is already required to remain impartial, with which Mr McIntyre agreed.

Voting:

Ayes: 29

Noes: 7

The amendment was passed.

Item Eight: Constitutional Amendment II (Rules Impartiality) - Proposed by Adam McIntyre of University College, Seconded by Oliver Cox of Trevelyan College.

The President-Elect is taking the minutes for this item.

Mr McIntyre outlined that the amendment prevents members of the Rules Committee from stepping down during elections and reclaiming their position once that election had concluded, and introduces a mechanism for removing members deemed to be “openly partial”. The amendment also defines “openly partial” in the Constitution’s schedules.

Voting:

Ayes: 27

Noes: 3

2 spoiled ballots.

The amendment was passed.

Item Nine: Constitutional Amendment III (Welfare) - Proposed by Joshua Doherty of Stephenson College, Seconded by Milli Hargreaves of Van Mildert College.

Mr Doherty outlined that the amendment removes the Welfare Officer's voting rights in order to avoid politicisation of the role. He stated that the Welfare Officer supported the amendment.

Avesta Afshari-Mehr asked how could the role might be politicised. Mr Doherty responded that the Welfare Officer is appointed by the Standing Committee, and some previous candidates have not been qualified and were there purely as "vote". He argued that the amendment is being proposed to ensure that doesn't happen again.

Raphael Hassid asked whether it may indeed be useful for the Welfare Officer to have a vote, arguing that they can vote from a Welfare perspective. The President Emeritus explained that the Welfare Officer acts as an advisor to the Standing Committee, with the Equalities Officer adding that the Welfare Officer also sits as an ex-officio member of the Equalities Committee.

Callum Hendry floated the idea that Debate Equity Officers may also have votes removed if the Welfare Officer's vote is to be removed. Mr Doherty argued that this may set a precedent for Debate Equity Officers having their vote removed too, however, he highlighted that he was not an expert, and stated that it is "us up to debate to decide internally".

Voting:

Ayes: 33

Noes: 2

The amendment was passed.

Item Ten: Social Secretary Election

The President-Elect is taking the minutes for this item.

One valid nomination:

- Magdalena Andreou of Trevelyan College, Proposed by Oliver Cox of Trevelyan College, Seconded by Maria Hunt of St. Aidan's College.

Ms Andreou stated that socials had been central to her experience at Durham and had been instrumental in helping her build friendships and a sense of belonging within the University and the Society. She emphasised that for many members, socials are the first and sometimes only point of engagement with the Union, and that she wished to ensure that all attendees feel welcome, supported, and enthusiastic about participating.

Ms Andreou noted her experience as Deputy Social Secretary in the previous term, as well as her year-long service on Social Committee, working under two different Social Secretaries. She stressed the importance of a strong and active Social Committee.

Ms Andreou further outlined her intention to prioritise accessibility and inclusivity, with particular emphasis on affordability and a diverse range of social formats. She cited her desire to balance larger events at 24 North Bailey with more relaxed and alcohol-free socials.

She concluded by stating her ambition to ensure that Union socials are not only well attended, but also enjoyable, memorable, and central to members' long-term positive experiences of the Society.

Molly Purcell asked Ms Andreou about the Social Committee budget, noting that in recent terms it had been difficult to break even, and highlighting that in the remainder of the President's term, socials would be moving away from events with free alcohol towards more activity-based formats.

Ms Andreou acknowledged Ms Purcell's point and stated that she would be keen to liaise closely with Standing Committee to ensure that socials are financially sustainable, and that she would be happy to plan events within these constraints while maintaining her commitment to accessibility and inclusivity.

Raphael Hassid asked about Ms Andreou's pledge to host more alcohol-free socials, suggesting that the primary purpose of a social is to drink together.

Ms Andreou responded that, while alcohol is often associated with socials, it is not essential for people to enjoy themselves, and noted that the President-Elect had already planned to host several non-alcohol-oriented socials. She argued that a wider variety of events would allow more members to feel comfortable and included.

Oliver Hughes asked Ms Andreou what her favourite cocktail was.

Ms Andreou replied that it was "a tough question", but ultimately stated that her favourite cocktail was an espresso martini.

Adam McIntyre asked what Ms Andreou would do if the Bar Manager were to give her the security codes for 24 North Bailey.

Ms Andreou responded humorously that she “would take it to her grave”.

Joshua Doherty asked who her favourite member of the 24 North Bailey bar staff was.

Ms Andreou replied that Joshua Doherty (employee of the month) was her favourite member of the 24s bar staff.

Francesca Greenhalgh asked how Ms Andreou would manage potential cultural problems within 24 North Bailey.

Ms Andreou responded that she would seek to foster a positive and inclusive culture within the space, working closely with bar staff, officers, and members to ensure that behaviour at socials aligns with the Union’s values and expectations, and that any issues are addressed constructively and promptly.

Ms Andreou was escorted out of the room by a member of the Rules Committee.

Oliver Cox was invited to propose Ms Andreou.

He began by reflecting on his experience of being elected to General Committee alongside Ms Andreou, and described her as highly sociable, approachable, and capable of forming genuine connections with a wide range of people. He argued that these personal qualities made her particularly well-suited to the role of Social Secretary.

He also noted that his personal relationship with Ms Andreou was the reason why he had such confidence in her for “such a demanding role”.

Joshua Doherty asked Mr Cox what Ms Andreou’s “pint time” was.

Mr Cox replied that Ms Andreou does not typically drink pints, but that she has an impressive “wine chop” time.

Voting:

Magdalena Andreou: 31

RON: 3

Magdalena Andreon was duly elected as Social Secretary of the Durham Union Society.

Item Eleven: Sponsorship Officer Election

Two valid nominations:

- Muhammad Khan of Hatfield College, Proposed by Finn Record of St. Chad's College, Seconded by Bheenee Chopra of South College.
- Sean Smith of South College, Proposed by India jubb of University College, Seconded by Theo Sanguinazzi of John Snow College.

Muhammad Khan:

Mr Khan began by outlining his intention to grow and deepen the Union's engagement with small, local businesses, arguing that there was significant untapped potential for sponsorship within the Durham area.

He stated that he had already begun discussions with the Treasurer regarding sponsorship initiatives and had made contact with Johnson's Cleaners, who had expressed interest in providing services to Union members free of charge. r partnership".

Mr Khan emphasised the importance of building "smarter, structured, long-term partnerships" and proposed working with institutions that support universities.

He further suggested expanding external sponsorship of events, citing Guernsey Financial Services' sponsorship of the Dominic Johnson address in Epiphany 2025 as a successful example.

He committed to organising at least one sponsored networking event per term and proposed the creation of a "Durham Union Strategic Sponsorship Framework" to ensure continuity between officeholders.

He also advocated for a complete revitalisation of the Sponsorship Brochure, incorporating membership statistics and audience data. He concluded by stating that his aim was for the Union to present "a compelling case for partnership, not just a request for sponsorship".

Sean Smith:

Mr Smith began by citing his experience on House Committee and described the Union as one of the primary reasons he chose to attend Durham University.

He highlighted his previous internship experience, where he had worked on outreach and sponsorship initiatives, and stated that he wished to modernise the Union's sponsorship model.

Mr Smith proposed initiating contact with international organisations that support universities, arguing that the Durham Union's membership and profile made it an attractive partner. He emphasised the importance of teamwork and argued that the sponsorship brochure should showcase the Union's prestige, membership figures, and include case studies of successful partnerships. He also cited his existing connections with local businesses through his role as Secretary of DUCUA.

He concluded by stating that, if elected, he would serve with the same level of commitment and dedication he had demonstrated on House Committee.

Questions:

Tobias Gumm asked both candidates whether there was a line they would draw regarding who the Union should accept sponsorship from.

Mr Smith replied that certain firms may hold views that conflict with the Union's values, and that such decisions should be taken collectively by officers. Mr Khan responded that negotiations should be entered into from a position of strength, and that the Union must honour its commitment to free speech, but should not collaborate with organisations that make excessive demands or compromise the Society's independence.

Avesta Afshari-Mehr asked which pizza restaurant each candidate would most like to guarantee sponsorship from.

Mr Khan responded that his choice would be Rudy's, while Mr Smith stated that he would choose Café Capriccio, owing to his existing relationship with them.

Molly Purcell asked how each candidate envisioned their working relationship with the Treasurer, noting that the Treasurer formally oversees sponsorship.

Mr Smith replied that he valued checks and balances and envisaged a very close relationship with the Treasurer, stating that he would not act in opposition to the Treasurer's judgement. Mr Khan similarly emphasised collaboration, proposing weekly meetings to set objectives and arguing that while he would lead execution, this would be done under the strategic guidance of the Treasurer.

Tilly Young asked how each candidate would modernise sponsorship while respecting the Union's history.

Mr Khan responded that this would involve incorporating data and analytics into the sponsorship brochure and improving the visibility of sponsors through initiatives such as pre-event promotional reels. Mr Smith replied that modernisation should be nuanced and flexible, agreeing on the importance of data, but also emphasising the need to preserve the Union's core traditions and identity.

Joshua Brookin asked how each candidate would ensure they did not over-promise and under-deliver.

Mr Smith responded that close cooperation with other officers and a diversified media-based approach to sponsorship would ensure realistic outcomes. Mr Khan stated that his approach would focus on deeper engagement with the local community, institutionalising partnerships, and drawing on his previous experience, including raising £1.4 million for a hospital in Pakistan and working with Pepsi.

Raphael Hassid asked how each candidate would integrate DUS sponsorship into the wider university community.

Mr Khan replied that increased visibility of partnerships would raise awareness of the Union and lead to higher membership engagement. Mr Smith responded that collaboration with the Social Secretary and integration of sponsors into social and cultural events would strengthen the Union's presence.

Voting:

Muhammad Khan: 14

Sean Smith: 19

RON: 3

Sean Smith was duly elected as Sponsorship Officer of the Durham Union Society .

Item Twelve: Rules Committee Election

One valid nomination:

- Callum Oxley of Trevelyan College, Proposed by Angel Ellis of Hatfield College, Seconded by Benjamin Huthwaite of Stephenson College.

Mr Oxley introduced himself as “the President from a long time ago”. He opened by stating that he possessed a strong knowledge of the Union's Constitution. He described the Rules Committee as an area of the Society's governance that he cared deeply about and wished to continue contributing to.

Ryan Wilmot-Simmons asked Mr Oxley what his favourite Rules Committee social had been.

Mr Oxley replied that it was a cheese and wine evening held at St John's College.

Edward Tye asked Mr Oxley what his favourite line in the Constitution was.

Mr Oxley replied “the usual places”, referencing a presidential election in Easter Term of his first year, in which the phrase “the usual places” had been pivotal in determining the outcome.

Francesca Greenhalgh asked how Mr Oxley would manage the transition from President to a committee member, and how he would ensure that he did not overstep his authority.

Mr Oxley replied that the RO, Ryan, had “an iron grip”, and that he was confident in his ability to respect the authority and boundaries of the role.

As the only nominee, Callum Oxley is duly elected to the Rules Committee of the Durham Union Society.

Item Thirteen: Any Other Business

Avesta Afshari-Mehr asked whether there would be a stash drop this term. The President confirmed there would be, but stated that he would liaise with the Outreach Officer to find out dates.

The Steward announced that members of House Committee were to meet at Elvet Methodist Church at 19:30.

Ryan invited members to join him at The Bishops Mill following the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 15:48.