

Chair's Statement – NUST AGM 2024

Dear Members of NUST,

As we reflect on the year since our previous AGM, I am pleased to report significant progress and development within the Trust. Throughout this time, we have navigated various challenges and celebrated notable achievements, all while remaining steadfast in our commitment to representing the interests of our members and the wider Newcastle United supporter community.

Firstly, I would like to touch upon the financial aspect of the Trust. We have undergone an exercise to significantly reduce our spending and overheads, as reflected in our latest set of accounts. After experiencing losses last year, I am pleased to announce that we have now achieved a break-even point. Moving forward, it is imperative that we find ways to generate more income. This year, we have successfully increased our revenue through events and donations from lifetime members, a suggestion made by a member at last year's AGM. However, we must continue to explore avenues for increasing our income streams. One of the main strengths of the Trust is our commitment to keeping membership fees as low as possible to ensure accessibility. Yet, with increased income comes a greater ability to influence, enabling us to better advocate for the interests of our fan base.

We will soon present a motion for your vote regarding the discontinuation of the Trust's obligation to undergo a full statutory audit. It's noteworthy that the majority of FSA-affiliated supporter trusts operate without undergoing this level of audit, the legal requirement and Financial Conduct Authority guidance dis-application of an audit states the value of aggregate assets must be below £2.8 million and turnover below £5.6 million. Initially, our Board deemed it prudent to conduct a full audit, especially while managing the 1892 Pledge Scheme and overseeing approximately £200,000 in donations from our members and the wider fan base. However, upon receiving advice and recommendations from our auditors, who no longer view it as necessary based on their professional assessment, the Board now believes it's unnecessary. The approximate annual cost of £2,000 for this audit is now deemed to be an inefficient use of member funds. It's essential to clarify that this motion solely pertains to disapplying the necessity for a statutory audit; our accounts will continue to be completed by an independent chartered accountant and presented to members for approval.

On to the football related matters, I want to highlight the importance of our annual survey. This year, we conducted numerous surveys to gather data and evidence that would help us better influence the club. Our main annual survey provides valuable insights into the sentiments and priorities of our members. By summarising the key findings and sharing them with the club, we can effectively advocate for changes and improvements that reflect the diverse views and needs of the fan base. The Board are already working on the content and questions for the 2024 annual survey so please do watch out for when this lands in your inbox.

I cannot overlook the challenges over the last year surrounding ticketing, with so much change in such a short space of time. Over the past year, we have provided extensive feedback to the club regarding issues, concerns, and areas for improvement in ticketing policies. There is no doubt that they are listening, as evidenced by the recent ticketing workshops and early changes made. Now is the time for action from the club to ensure that ticketing policies are optimised for the next season.

One positive step the club has taken is the establishment of the Fans' Advisory Board (FAB). I am confident that our delegates, Adam and Paul, will represent NUST effectively within this forum. However, while we welcome the creation of the FAB, we also advocate for true, meaningful fan engagement beyond the minimum standards set by the Premier League. The FAB represents the bare minimum approach mandated by league regulations, and we believe that Newcastle United had the opportunity to establish a best-in-class supporter engagement model following the takeover. We will closely monitor the progress of the FAB and hope that it will prove to be a success, although only time will tell.

I am also pleased that the new board members who have brought fresh perspectives and energy to the Trust. Adam, Lisa, Felicity, Kevin, Pete, and Olivia have seamlessly integrated into the management of the Trust, demonstrating a strong commitment to advancing the goals of the Trust. Their dedication to the cause of Newcastle fans is commendable, and I have full confidence in their ability to drive the Trust forward.

After six years of service, I have made the decision to step down from the Board. I took on the role as Chair for a second time for the past year to ensure a smooth transition and in the long-term interest of the Trust given, we had an almost entirely new Board.

It is important to recognise that the individuals who comprise our board are motivated solely by their passion for Newcastle United and their desire to serve the best interests of our fan base and Newcastle United. There are no ulterior motives or self-interests driving our actions. As a democratic and accountable organisation, we adhere to strict conduct policies and procedures to maintain transparency and integrity in all our endeavours.

Unfortunately, our dedication to serving the fan base has sometimes made us targets of unwarranted personal attacks on social media. I want to emphasize that social media does not always reflect the true sentiments of our fan base. While we value constructive feedback and engagement from our members, we must also recognise the limitations of social media as a gauge of public opinion. Our doors are always open to those who wish to engage with us directly and constructively, and I encourage anyone with questions or concerns to reach out to us via email.

We receive a tremendous amount of positive feedback and support, which serves as a testament to the vital role that NUST plays in advocating for the interests of our fans. Together, we will continue to strive for positive change and progress, ensuring that the voice of the Newcastle United fan base is heard and respected.

In closing, I urge all members of NUST to focus on the positive impact that our organisation continues to make within the Newcastle United community, not only in our engagement to

influence decision-making at Newcastle United but this year we've had the chance to visit the NUST classroom at NUCASTLE and attend the opening of the Alan Shearer Foundation sensory play area - both made possible by our members. And I must not forget our donations to the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation and the (then) West End Foodbank and I know Bill Corcoran is here tonight and will say a few words about the foodbank towards the end of the meeting.

Thank you for your ongoing support and dedication.

Greg Tomlinson
Chair, Newcastle United Supporters Trust (NUST)