



NEWCASTLE UNITED SUPPORTERS TRUST ANNUAL SURVEY REPORT 2023



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Members,

What a year it has been: top four and the Champions League and a cup final at Wembley! Alongside the highs on the pitch, there have been a lot of positive changes off the pitch – and with the demand for ticketing increasingly significantly, several challenges as well.

It has also been a positive year for the Trust, marked by significant milestones that demonstrate our dedication to advocating for our fan base and fostering positive change within the club and our community.

Our renewed commitment to our members is evident in the formation of a refreshed board, a result of a robust election process that welcomed six exceptional new board members. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to outgoing board members, including Alex Hurst, whose tireless efforts were instrumental in the relaunch of the Trust in 2019. Without his dedication, the Trust wouldn't be what it is today.

Our members have every reason to



take pride in the achievements of Newcastle United this year – and of the Trust. Notably, fans have witnessed a substantial improvement in the club's engagement with fans, highlighted by the establishment of a dedicated Supporter Services department and the introduction of a dedicated Supporter Liaison Officer.

While celebrating our achievements, we also acknowledge the challenges that persist and areas of focus we must keep pushing the club on, particularly regarding ticketing matters; be it learning for future cup finals, digital ticketing, away tickets, and memberships. Rest assured that your concerns have been diligently conveyed to the club by the Trust, and they are actively listening and

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

responding to your feedback.

In line with our commitment to community involvement, we successfully closed the 1892 Pledge Scheme this year and contributed an impressive £200,000 to four commendable charities: the Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, Newcastle United Foundation, Newcastle Foodbank, and the Alan Shearer Foundation. Our board collaborated closely with these charities to ensure that the funds raised are utilised effectively within the local community and, as progress is made on the projects, we will provide members with further updates. We also extend our gratitude to the Scheme Guardians, George Caulkin, Ian Mearns MP, Warren Barton, and Lee Humble for their invaluable contributions.

The Trust is undergoing transformation, driven on by new ownership at Newcastle United that values engagement and has set an exciting growth strategy for our club. A robust and influential democratically elected

Trust remains essential to safeguarding fans' perspectives and guiding the club's decisions.

Looking ahead, we are excited about fostering even more meaningful engagement and are looking forward to the establishment of the club's Fan Advisory Board. Together, we will continue to shape the future of our beloved club.

As we embrace the upcoming 2023/24 season, both on and off the pitch, let us do so with renewed enthusiasm and optimism. Our united efforts will undoubtedly pave the way for a year filled with accomplishments, growth, challenges, Champions League nights and a stronger sense of community.

Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to the Trust – we are member-led for the benefit of our members.

- Greg Tomlinson, Newcastle United Supporters Trust Chair

MESSAGE FROM THE FSA



FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' ASSOCIATION

The need for fan engagement at all levels across the game has been emphasised following the Fan-led Review into Football Governance, of which the Newcastle United Supporters Trust submitted evidence into.

Fan engagement at Newcastle United is like chalk and cheese in comparison to pre-October 2021, and it's great to see NUST at the heart of the new relationship with the club.

We still face many challenges as supporters that highlight the need for supporter organisations to represent the collective voice of fans to the club and on a national level. The impact of TV on match-going fans and price rises across the league have been key topics of late, amongst many other things, where the battle continues for match-going supporters to ensure normal supporters are not priced out of the game.

Being a member of your fan organisations is crucial. With a relatively new and fresh board in place, it's fantastic to see such interest in being involved in the supporter movement at Newcastle, and everyone at The FSA wishes NUST and its members all of the success moving forward.

- Thomas Concannon, Premier League Network Manager, Football Supporters Association.

01 INTRODUCTION

The Newcastle United Supporters Trust (NUST) is a democratically elected, non-profit organisation that aims to represent the views of the fans as a critical friend of Newcastle United.

NUST has more than 10,000 members and recently held an election that saw six new board members elected in what was the biggest change in board personnel since its relaunch in 2019.

The board is now made up of the following members with Colin Whittle as Secretary.



Greg Tomlinson
NUST Chair



Paul Karter
NUST Vice Chair



Cliff Culley
Board member since
2021



Charlotte Robson
Board member since
2020



Pete Davey
Board member since
2023



Felicity Thow
Board member since
2023



Lisa Mole
Board member since
2023



Adam Stoker
Board member since
2023



Olivia Thomson
Board member since
2023



Kevin Patterson
Board member since
2023

02 NUST 2022-2023

There have been many notable achievements by NUST throughout the 2022/23 season.

November 2022 – NUST donates £200,000 to local charities

Following the takeover of Newcastle United in October 2021, November 2022 saw the formal end to the 1892 Pledge Scheme, which aimed to buy a stake in the club under its previous ownership. Following a member vote, in which 97.5% voted in favour, the following charities benefited from the funds collected:

- The Alan Shearer Foundation – £83,500
- Newcastle Foodbank – £27,500
- The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation – £59,000
- Newcastle United Foundation – £30,000



**THE ALAN SHEARER
FOUNDATION**
Valuing Disability

Newcastle Foodbank

**NEWCASTLE
UNITED
FOUNDATION**



January 2023 – Trust stands up for fans caught up in Sheffield Wednesday overcrowding

NUST collated feedback from fans affected by the overcrowding at NUFC's FA Cup tie against Sheffield Wednesday. Trust board member Cliff Culley and former board member (now FSA employee) Thomas Concannon met with the EFL's Head of Safety and Security, which subsequently led to the reduction in capacity of the affected Hillsborough Stand.

February 2023 – Strawberry Place leasehold returns to NUFC

NUST have long held the belief that the land at Strawberry Place should not be sold for private development and should instead be used for the benefit of the football club and the local community. When an application was made for planning permission, NUST objected and were represented at the Council planning committee meetings. In February 2023, the Trust were delighted to see the land transferred back to NUFC and the club has since applied for planning permission for a new fan zone on this land.

02 NUST 2022-2023

February 2023 – Carabao Cup Final, Wembley

In what was our first major Cup Final since 1999, thousands of NUFC fans descended on London in February. Understandably the demand for tickets was high and the system for ticket allocation led to confusion and disappointment for some fans. NUST put the most pressing questions to NUFC regarding the process of ticket distribution and overall allocation of away tickets to fans versus corporate attendees and were able to provide answers to the membership. Following the Final, NUST asked the club to further clarify Wembley ticket allocation (of which 97% went to season ticket holders) and the club provided additional detail through a statement posted on the Trust website and social media.



March 2023 – Trust launches Ticketing Pulse Survey

After hearing from many members about ticket purchasing difficulties, NUST ran a pulse survey on the topic. The majority of members (60%) felt that 10% or less of standard entry away tickets should be made available for corporate attendees. The full results of the survey can be seen on the Trust website.

May 2023 – Elections to the Board

July 2023 – NUST marches with United With Pride at Northern Pride

August 2023 – NUST contributes to positive change in ballot process for home games

Following the announcement from the club that home tickets would be randomly allocated following a ballot within the price regions of £44-£74, NUST successfully contributed to a club rethink within 24 hours that will now mean members can select a price category that suits them when entering the ballot.

03 TICKETING

We received 1399 responses to the 2023 Annual Survey with a roughly even split of season ticket holders to non-season ticket holders. Of those who were not season ticket holders, 55.9% were NUFC members in the 2022/23 season.

In the free text section at the end of the survey the most talked about issues from Trust members were to do with ticketing, with a large focus on opinions and suggestions around allocation of loyalty points, Box Office and/or payment issues, concerns about the forthcoming introduction of digital tickets and when memberships for non-season ticket holders may go on sale for the upcoming season (*NUFC memberships later went on sale on 26th July 2023*).

Ticket price increases and payment schemes

Over the course of the summer, NUFC released the pricing details for season tickets and cup competitions for season ticket holders. We asked NUST members for their opinions on the price increases.

The table below shows the majority opinion for each category with the percentage of this vote shown in brackets.

	Season ticket	Championship League	FA Cup	League Cup
Season ticket holders	About right (54.4%)	About right (55.6%)	About right (70.7%)	About right (81.5%)
Non-Season ticket holders	About right (67.6%)	About right (61.8%)	About right (71.9%)	About right (75.6%)

Although this data indicates that the majority of NUST members are happy with the recent price increases, some members raised concerns in the free text portion of the survey pointing out that the games were being priced

03 TICKETING

ahead of knowing the opposition and in the case of the FA and Carabao Cups, the number of home games we might be involved in. There was some sentiment expressed that we should expect an increase in prices, especially given recent on-field success, but many also agree that football should be accessible to everyone and that further increases to ticket prices over the coming years may price supporters both old and new out of the market.

The club also announced changes for season ticket holders. One such change is the removal of automatic NUFC membership from the season ticket, meaning holders will no longer have the ability to purchase additional tickets in the members' sale (unless they purchase membership separately). Whilst 51.1% of the non-season ticket holders we surveyed were happy with the removal of club membership, 52.6% of season ticket holders were unhappy with the change.

Another major change for season 2023/24 is the introduction of payment schemes for the three cup competitions NUFC will feature in this season. Season ticket holders were given the opportunity to sign up to any or all of the competitions with payment taken at various intervals throughout the season. An overwhelming majority of 95% of the season ticket holders we surveyed had signed up to all three cup schemes.

The cup scheme introduction has not been without its problems ahead of the season starting. At NUST we have heard from many supporters who encountered difficulties either in signing up for the cup schemes initially or in having their payment taken for the first Champions League group stage game. The following are examples of issues that we have passed onto the club:

A season ticket holder noticed his first Champions League payment hadn't been taken so contacted the club. He was told he had only signed up for the second and third games, although the club agreed that this wasn't an option offered at the time of signing up.

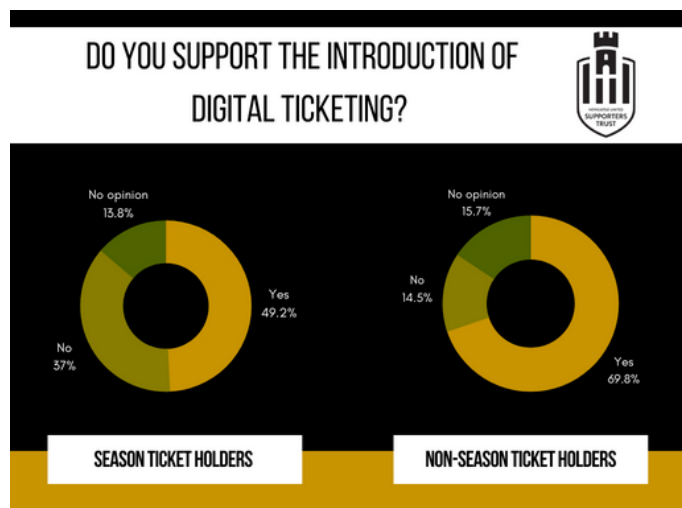
03 TICKETING

A season ticket holder had tried to confirm if payment had been taken on the day of signing up to the cup scheme but didn't receive a response from the club. On the day the payment was due to be taken, the supporter contacted the club again as no payment was taken. The supporter was informed that an error had occurred but nothing could be done as the deadline for joining the scheme had passed.

Digital Ticketing

Season 2023/24 will see the first roll out of digital ticketing at St James' Park. This will mean each ticket will need to be held on an individual device and scanned on entrance to the stadium.

We asked NUST members whether they supported the introduction of digital tickets.



The majority of non-season ticket holders supported the change whereas just under half of season ticket holders reported they felt happy about the new system. This is likely largely due to concerns about the transfer of a ticket to another supporter in the event that the season ticket holder themselves is unable to make a game, though the club have confirmed that up to ten transfers to an eligible individual will be permitted throughout the season.

Based on the survey results, the top four concerns to do with digital ticketing among NUST members are:

"How easy will it be to transfer my ticket to family and friends if I can't go to a match?"

"What if my phone breaks/is lost?"

"What if I don't have a smartphone or I struggle to use digital tickets?"

"Is the club tech reliable enough for this to roll out successfully?"

03 TICKETING

Data from Ofcom in 2023 suggests that 33% of those over 65 don't have a smartphone and so we welcome the clarification on alternatives to digital tickets, which the club report will be released before the start of the season. NUST welcome the subsequent announcement of sessions organised by the club for those who aren't confident using digital tickets.

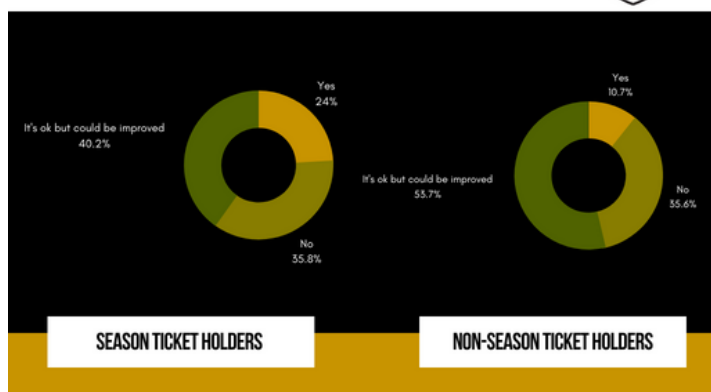
Loyalty points

There have been two ticketing workshops organised by the club during the pre-season, both of which were attended by NUST board members. One major talking point throughout our survey was loyalty points; namely whether the loyalty point system is fit for purpose.

In both season ticket and non-season ticket holder categories, our survey suggested that many felt the loyalty point system could be improved. Based on feedback from both the survey and the club-run ticketing workshops, many supporters think that while the loyalty point system works well to reward the most dedicated travelling fans and that should be protected, there is scope to cut down on abuse of the system, for example by those who benefit from accruing loyalty points for tickets that are then regularly sold on.

When the club asked the Trust for feedback following the ticketing events, we answered their questions with answers detailed below.

IS THE LOYALTY POINT SYSTEM FIT FOR PURPOSE?



NUFC: How do we introduce new home and international fans to away matches?

The Trust is of the view that there should be no preferential treatment for any new fans to gain immediate priority access to away tickets, be they local, national or international fans.

03 TICKETING

NUFC: Is the loyalty points system a fair way to distribute away tickets?

The Trust is of the view that the existing loyalty point system is fundamentally fair providing it is not abused. It is the correct way to distribute away tickets, rewarding those fans that have travelled all over the United Kingdom and Europe following Newcastle United over many years.

The system could be improved, which could include loyalty points being awarded for purchasing season tickets, a membership and/or home cup tickets.

The Trust welcomes the club's recent commitment in relation to timing of away ticket sales and would recommend this is done on a daily basis with qualifying points requirement dropping each day.

The Trust would welcome full clarity on the number of tickets made available for each away game, and notes other clubs such as Manchester United publish this detail on their website.

The Trust acknowledges that a small percentage of away tickets are made available to corporate ticket holders

and players' families. The Trust does not agree with the distribution of standard entry away tickets to these categories and believe a Premier League-wide reciprocal agreement should be made to create an area for such away fans within existing corporate areas.

NUFC: How do we ensure people buying the tickets are using them (E.g. not selling them on)?

The Trust is aware that other clubs have utilised a collection process whereby a small number of randomly selected ticket holders must collect their ticket at a game and provide ID to match the ticket purchase to do so. Any such process should not be over-zealous or delay entry into a match. A Premier League-wide digital ticketing strategy may also help in this area.

In addition, the Trust suggest that the club monitor social media and third party re-sale platforms and put in place sufficient penalties for abuse of loyalty system to act as a deterrent.

03 TICKETING

We heard from many international fans in the survey who talked about the impossibility of purchasing tickets, particularly when also limited by the timeframe of their visit to the UK and it appears that the club are taking this into consideration in the questions they put to the workshop groups and the introduction of International Membership. However, with on field success creating an already higher than usual demand for away tickets, it is likely that there are more appropriate options than away game attendance for this supporter group.

76.6% of season ticket holders and 63.8% of non-season ticket holders in our survey felt that loyalty points should be awarded for purchases other than away match tickets, for example for a season ticket or cup game ticket purchase. With even the recent midweek pre-season friendly at Ibrox not dropping to zero points for an allocation of 8000, this suggested change to the system may give supporters who attend matches but are unable to get on the loyalty point ladder a change to accrue points.

Corporate seating

Some fans were approached by the club this pre-season to be informed their seats were being moved to allow for the introduction of new corporate seating areas. Twenty six of our survey respondents said that this change affected them with 72% of them feeling that the club did not communicate this in a timely manner and 44% reporting they felt the club had not offered them suitable alternative seats.

The balance between increasing revenue from corporate ticket sales and ensuring that the matchday experience at NUFC is accessible to the everyday fan is one that the club must strike, both for reasons of fan satisfaction and stadium atmosphere.



03 TICKETING

Memberships

At the time of writing, three weeks before the start of the new season and two weeks after season ticket renewal deadline, the club had yet to announce details of club membership renewal. [NUFC memberships later went on sale on 26th July 2023]. We have heard from many affected supporters both in the survey and via email expressing their increasing concern about this and the Trust have passed this onto the club in the communication regarding ticketing shared above.

Our opinion is that increased communication from the club would be welcomed with regards to plans and timeframes to help manage supporter expectations and reduce anxiety surrounding new processes.



04 OWNERSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP

NUFC Ownership

Following the first full season under ownership of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), PCP Capital Partners and RB Sports & Media consortium, 98.4% of our survey respondents reported a level of satisfaction with the operation of the club under the current ownership and executive leadership team. Close to 100% were satisfied with the investment put into the club and only 4% reported any disappointment in communication from the club.



While the support for the current owners was overwhelmingly positive, we did hear from some supporters who were more conflicted about the 80% PIF ownership.

As a Trust we were glad to see NUFC announce that they would be the main sponsors of Northern Pride 2023 at which NUST board members marched with representatives from United With Pride. While high levels of satisfaction with the club owners is in stark contrast to previous years, it's important that throughout the on-pitch success, football remains inclusive to everyone, regardless of sexuality or gender.

04 OWNERSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP

2023/24 Strip

Sela, a Saudi-based and PIF-owned events, hospitality, and real estate company became our main shirt sponsors for season 2023/24. It is reported that they will have involvement with the future fan zone development and the majority of survey respondents were welcoming of the new deal. 93.8% of those we asked were fans of the new home shirt although two thirds felt it was too expensive, priced at £70 for an adult shirt.

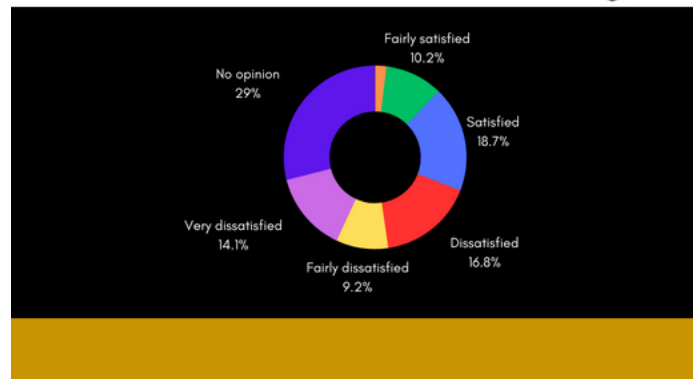
The new green away strip was slightly less popular with 70% thinking it was excellent or good and almost two thirds again feeling it was too expensive.



Castore

We asked for opinions on the club's shirt manufacturer Castore and the results were mixed suggesting there is room for improvement on quality and customer service.

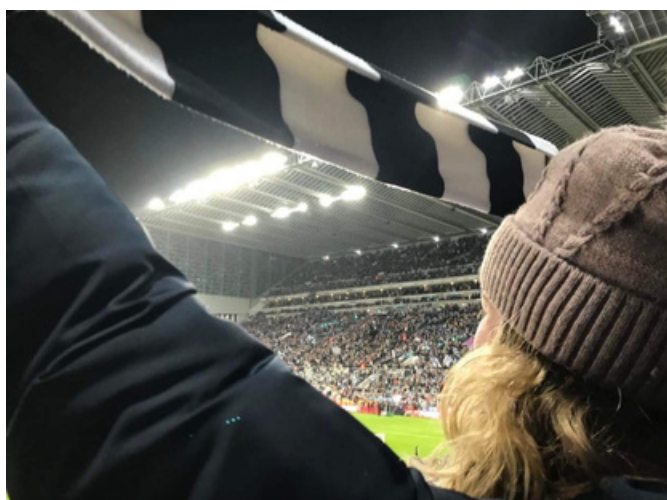
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE OF CASTORE?



05 CLUB LIAISON

NUST welcomed the appointment of Sarah Medcalf to Head of Supporter Services in August 2022 and Matt Willis to Supporter Liaison Officer in May 2023 within the brand new Supporter Services department. NUFC's Fan Engagement Review (2022/23 season) named CEO Darren Eales as the Nominated Board Level Official leading fan engagement activities.

That the club are actively working towards supporter engagement is a positive step given the situation under the previous ownership. Our survey indicated that there is work to be done to highlight Supporter Services to fans, with 56.7% of survey respondents being unaware of this resource and only 19.3% reporting they knew who the dedicated Supporter Liaison Officer is.



With the launch of the Fan Engagement Standard by the Premier League in March 2023, each club are now required to introduce a Fan Advisory Board (FAB) to ensure meaningful engagement with supporters. Just over two thirds of our survey respondents were unaware of this move and future creation of a FAB at Newcastle United.



**SUPPORTER SERVICES
AT NUFC**

Head of Supporter Services - Sarah Medcalf
Supporter Liaison Officer - Matt Willis

Email: supporter.services@nufc.co.uk



06 NUFC WOMEN

In June 2023, Newcastle United Women announced they will become a professional football club; the first in the FA Women's National League history. More than 97% of those we surveyed were aware of this move that is significant for women and girls across the region, as well as the football club as a whole. The overwhelming majority of our survey respondents supported the growth of NUFC Women and womens' football in the North East.



07 ST JAMES' PARK

Future developments

The club recently announced early plans for a Fanzone at St James' Park, which the majority of our survey respondents were in favour of. There have been media reports of plans being floated for the expansion of the East Stand to increase capacity and many members in the free text section of the survey were keen to hear more about stadium development plans.

Suggested improvements

The most voted for improvement option at St James' Park in the survey was for wifi and better phone signal, followed by better quality food and drink offerings and improved facilities such as toilets and concourse areas.

Some respondents raised issues that disabled fans are encountering due to increased demand for lift usage on match days leading to delays accessing the stadium. With an ageing population as well as increasing rates of disability in the UK, this is likely to be a concern that the club will need to address in the coming seasons.

Other issues raised to us in the survey included the difficulty in seeing the big

screen on matchdays from parts of the Gallowgate and East Stand which makes it difficult to follow VAR decision outcomes. Fans in certain areas also reported difficulty seeing the stadium clock from their seats.



Wor Flags

We heard from several survey respondents praising the work of Wor Flags, which the Trust would like to echo.

"Wor Flags, as an independent group, need a special mention; their ideas and ways of promoting flag chaos and displays is very commendable indeed and add to the intimidating atmosphere for away teams when they visit SJP" - Survey respondent

08 NUST FEEDBACK

The final part of our survey asked for our members' opinions about the Trust itself. 87.3% of respondents reported satisfaction with how NUST represents its members and the vast majority would recommend joining to their family and friends. Approximately 90% of respondents would be interested or might be interested in attending an event run by NUST in the future and some members added in the free text section that they'd value being able to meet the Trust and connect with fellow supporters at events. Some respondents also requested events further afield than central Newcastle, eg Northumberland or London.

Currently, the membership fee to join NUST is £1 per year which poses issues with regular renewals and because of admin costs, means a significant portion of each £1 does not go to the Trust. One proposed solution is to switch to a 10-year or lifetime membership option, where a member would pay, for example, £10 and would not need to renew within that 10-year period. Only 16.6% of respondents were against this idea suggesting this may

be a preferred system for many.

We asked how NUST can improve its offering to our members and allowed a free text response to allow for detail. We were pleased to see a lot of positive feedback from members as well as constructive ideas for improvements.

*"Proud to be a member of the NUST and thankful for all the work board members have done to represent the fans' voice with ownership. HWTL." -
Survey respondent*

*"I think there is a political blindness to the benefits of a democratically-elected Trust, with some people not appreciating what is being undertaken and why.
Keep it up, it's truly appreciated!" -
Survey respondent*

*"Fan-led is one thing but a proper structure and professional representation on other matters is very important. Job well done so far" -
Survey respondent*

08 NUST FEEDBACK

The following areas were the most common themes in the feedback section of the survey.

1. Communication

Currently communication from NUST to its members includes publication of meeting minutes on the Trust website, email updates and social media posts. The Trust's YouTube channel is also used for discussions and updates when needed. Following the recent election of new board members, the Trust has also released a short video update to social media following the first board meeting and this has been received positively by members based on feedback on the post itself and responses noted in the survey.

Despite this, one of the biggest requests from the survey was for the Trust to increase communication and visibility with suggestions including increased social media presence, increased surveying of member opinion, audio updates via podcasts and more regular newsletter-style email updates.

2. Representation of Trust members

Some respondents called for greater representation of all groups beyond season ticket holders, eg NUFC members, international fans and those based in other areas of the UK. There was strong desire from fans outside of the city to feel a sense of connection to the club through involvement with the Trust. The Trust always strives to represent all corners of the fanbase but with the recent elections, there is now an even greater diversity of representation from season ticket holders, NUFC members, non-members and supporters based outside of Newcastle upon Tyne on the board.

3. Trust purpose and goals

Many respondents felt they understood the aim of the Trust under the previous ownership but since the takeover and allocation of the Pledge Scheme funds to charity, they were less clear on the Trust's purpose. The Trust released a new Vision following the takeover but feedback from the survey suggests this is not widely known by our members.

08 NUST FEEDBACK

4. Work with other supporter groups

There were suggestions within the survey to co-ordinate with other supporter groups. NUST were pleased to be able to march with United with Pride, NUFC's LGBTQIA supporter group at Northern Pride 2023 and look forward to continuing to consolidate this working relationship.

The Trust is also looking to build a relationship with NUDSA, the club's Disabled Supporters Association.



With thanks to:

All NUST members for their support and to the members who filled in our annual survey.


Sarah Medcalf and Matt Willis for their work in NUFC Supporter Services and Supporter Liaison.

Thomas Concannon for his work at the FSA and for providing comments from the FSA at the start of this report.

United with Pride for their invitation to march at Northern Pride 2023.



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