

Demonstration Guidance

What is a demonstration?

As a student, you have the power to make a difference in the world. One of the ways you can do this is by demonstrating. There are many forms of demonstrations that aim to raise awareness, challenge the status quo, and advocate for change.

- **Protest** – A protest is a public expression of dissent or disapproval. It can take many forms, such as a rally, sit-in, or boycott. Protests can be peaceful or confrontational, and they often involve a group of people who share a common cause or goal. Protestors may hold signs, chant slogans, or engage in civil disobedience to draw attention to their cause. Protests can be a powerful tool for social change, as they can help to bring attention to important issues and put pressure on those in power to take action.
- **Stunt** – A stunt is a creative and attention-grabbing action that is designed to draw attention to a particular issue or cause. It can be a visual spectacle, such as a flash mob, or a provocative public art installation. Stunts are often used to spark conversation and generate media coverage, as they can be more eye-catching and memorable than traditional forms of activism. Stunts can be a great way to get people talking about a particular issue or cause, and they can help to raise awareness and build momentum for change.
- **March** – A march is a peaceful demonstration where a group of people walk together in support of a particular cause or issue. Marches can be organised for a variety of reasons, such as to show solidarity with a particular community, to raise awareness of a particular issue, or to call for change in government policies. Marches are often accompanied by chants, music, and speeches, and they can be a powerful way to bring attention to important issues and demonstrate public support for a cause.
- **Vigils** – Often communities come together to mark tragic or important events in their histories. Vigils might be held as a commemoration of previous events, such as on Trans Day of Remembrance, or they may be held in reaction to more recent events. Vigils are as much a show of solidarity and collective care, as they are a medium for change.

As a student, participating in demonstrations can be a powerful way to make your voice heard and advocate for change. Whether you are passionate about social justice, environmentalism, or human rights, there are many opportunities to get involved and make a difference.

It is important to remember that demonstrations should always be peaceful and respectful. While you should always be passionate and committed to your cause, it is never acceptable to engage in violence or to disrespect those with whom you disagree. By maintaining a peaceful and respectful approach, you can help to ensure that your message is heard and taken seriously.

When should you decide to protest?

Protests can be a powerful tool for social change, but it is important to know when and how to do them effectively. Going straight to a protest, before trying other tactics, is unlikely to be the most effective strategy. Instead, activists use escalation,

which is the gradual increase in visibility and intensity of tactics. This helps keep up momentum and prevents you from losing the goodwill of your target straight away.

Before planning a protest, it's helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- 1. Is the issue urgent and pressing?** If the issue is time-sensitive, such as a proposed law or policy change, it may be necessary to act quickly and deploy a protest to draw attention to the issue.
- 2. Is there a clear target and aim for the protest?** It is crucial to have a clear target, such as a university committee, an agency, or a corporation, with the power to enact the desired change. Without a clear target, a protest may be ineffective and fail to achieve its goals. Be clear about what you are asking of them.
- 3. Is there enough time to organise the protest safely and effectively?** You must leave enough time to plan appropriately for a protest. This includes having a clear plan for crowd control and informing protestors of their rights and responsibilities. Also, consider whether there is enough time to get media attention and mobilise students to attend.
- 4. Have you already tried to reach your target in other ways?** Sometimes change can be more effectively made with less combative tactics, such as internal lobbying. Try these tactics first before escalating to a protest.

Your rights and responsibilities

Once you start looking into the legalities of demonstrating, it can start to feel daunting, especially as a lot is dependent on the specific actions you are planning to take. Here are some key things to consider, what is required of you, and how you can get further support.

What tactics will you be using?

Different tactics have different legal implications. For example, damage to property, even temporarily, could be classed as criminal damage. This includes chalking on pavements.

Please consider your tactics carefully and do some research as to how they interact with the law. The Green and Black Cross [[Home | Green and Black Cross](#)] may be able to provide you with more specific legal advice with regards to certain tactics.

Make sure everyone organising the demonstration is agreed and clear on the tactics being used. You do not want anyone to “go rogue” and endanger the demonstration and attendees.

It can feel frustrating if a tactic you wish to use is not possible. Durham SU's priority must be the safety of our members. This does not mean, however, that there won't be other, more creative and effective ways to continue your campaign.

You can read more about the most common laws used at protests [here](#).

Where will you be demonstrating?

Demonstrating on university property is often the easiest and safest option, as the university are accustomed to student protesters and allow students to exercise their right to free speech. The University is also often the target of student protest, so it is usually the most effective place to be. They may still ask you to leave, especially if you are causing any harm to people or property.

If you are holding a large-scale protest on university property, we need to inform the university. The SU will do this for you – please email dsu.engagement@durham.ac.uk for help with this.

You should not protest on private property as you could [be accused of trespass](#).

If you wish to organise an event elsewhere in the city, contact Durham County Council to ask for permission first.

Will your demonstration be static?

If your demonstration is static, and you will not be moving locations, then you do not need to inform the police, though you may still wish to do so.

We would recommend having marshals who can ensure the protest doesn't turn into a march.

Are you intending to march?

If you are planning a march, especially if you will be walking along roads, you must [notify the police in advance](#).

Durham SU may be able to help you do this.

We would recommend having marshals who can help attendees stick to the planned route.

How many people will be attending?

The larger your demonstration, the more attention it will attract. Of course, a high turnout is a good thing! It just means you need to plan carefully to ensure that you can handle the number of people who attend.

How to safely marshal an event?

If you are aiming to protest via a mass-demonstration, then you should provide marshals for your event. The role of a marshal is to enable a safe and peaceful protest by keeping protesters in a safe location and making sure protesters behave safely.

Marshals can:

1. Ask protesters to move if they are blocking roads/pathways. This is because the police can disrupt protest activity if roads are being blocked.
2. Ask protesters to stop if they are engaging in behaviour that could harm others. This is because you need to keep people from harm during their involvement in the protest, not only for their safety but also to avoid any

allegations of harm/hate at the protest that could detract from the message.

You should gather an appropriate number of marshals before the event and establish who will be the main point of contact. You should set up a way of contacting each other (e.g. a WhatsApp group) and make sure to share other contacts that may be required – for example university security, the police and a first aid contact.

You should also have a plan for different possible risks, which should be included in your risk assessment (see below). All marshals should be aware of your contingency plans for any identified risks.

Provided your event is safely organised and risk assessed, you can borrow hi vis jackets from the SU for all marshals to wear.

Are you prepared to talk to the authorities?

Campus security, the police, or event organisers (if you are protesting a specific event) may come and speak to you whilst you demonstrate.

It is helpful if at least one of the organisers is confident on your rights to demonstrate and is prepared to speak to these people, should they ask questions.

Will there be media present?

If you have invited the media to your demonstration, or if it catches their eye, then yourself or any protesters may be asked for comment.

It is good to prepare what you wish to say in advance, in order to make the most of the opportunity and ensure you are not caught out by any questions. You may wish to prepare several people who are able and willing to speak to the media.

Please remember that if you are a Durham SU student group, the SU is legally liable for any comments you make to the media or publish yourselves. Please seek advice from an SU staff member if this is something you are intending or expecting to do.

What university policies apply to you?

There are two key pieces of university policy that would be particularly relevant to protesters.

Durham University's freedom of expression policy [[DurhamUniversityPolicyStatementonFreedomofExpression.pdf](#)] outlines your right to freely express your points of view on an issue.

The non-academic misconduct disciplinary procedure [[NAMP-PolicyTemplate-\(2022\).docx \(live.com\)](#)] outlines disciplinary measures for things like damaging the university's reputation.

It's important to balance your freedom to protest with the risk of breaking the university's behavioural expectations.

What forms are you required to fill in?

If you are an SU student group and are planning a demonstration, protest or campaign, you need to follow our usual processes for one-off events and activities. As such, you must complete a risk assessment and a trip and event form.

We'll also need to make sure that you've sent us any materials that you're planning to distribute as part of your event (either promotional or flyers that you hope to hand out).

Please be aware that we'll need 14 days to process your documents. This is to ensure that we can offer you the best possible support throughout the process of organising your protest.

You can find links below to the relevant documents:

- [Trip & Event Form](#)
- [Download Risk Assessment](#)

If you need more information on ensuring good Health and Safety at your protest, you can find this here:

- [Health & Safety](#)

Below, you'll also find a sample risk assessment for a protest event, which you can use as a template when considering what to include in yours:

- https://nusdigital.s3.amazonaws.com/document/documents/59464/Risk_Assessment_Templates_SU.zip

Further resources

Most student demonstrations in Durham happen peacefully, without intervention from the police. However, it is always a good idea to know your rights, particularly if you are engaging in a larger, national protest.

These resources provide more detail, including what you should do if the police intervene in your protest.

Legal briefings:

[Home | Green and Black Cross](#)

Information about new legislation:

[Protest rights - Liberty \(libertyhumanrights.org.uk\)](#)

https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice_information/pcsc-policing-act-protest-rights/

Student protest advice:

[Your Right To Protest - A guide for protestors\(1\).pdf \(peopleandplanet.org\)](#)

Who to speak to in the SU?

If you're an SU student group, get in touch with the Opportunities Team at dsu.engagement@durham.ac.uk

If you are not a registered student group or want help planning campaign strategy, get in touch with our Activism Programme Coordinator at sophie.l.birch@durham.ac.uk