

May 5 Assembly Briefing, 16.30 in Learning Lounge

Overview

Excitingly, our new [Articles of Association](#) have now been approved. That means updating our Standing Orders, the detailed rules that explain how everything works day to day. We want your feedback on what these should look like.

Not everything is changing. Just some key parts that shape how students get involved, influence decisions and make change happen. Before the [Board of Trustees](#) can decide, we need to consult with all of you.

This Assembly is an opportunity for you to discuss the proposed changes and see if you think the direction they're being taken in is a sensible one. Your conversations will all be taken forward to the Board of Trustees to help them in their final decision.

Who are [the Board of Trustees](#)? They're responsible for the governance and strategic management of the SU, and in this case that means they will approve the new Standing Orders so that all our governing documents make sense together. A majority of our Board of Trustees are Student Trustees.

The current Standing Orders can all be found here: [Governance of Assembly @ Durham SU](#)

Agenda Summary

16.30 - Pizza is served, arrive early for a bite to eat and a chat

17.00 - Introduction & Context from President Abi

17.10 - Roundtable Discussions on Proposed Changes

1. How do we decide our SU's beliefs? (Standing Order B and D: Policy and Assembly) - facilitated by Fran (Community Officer)
2. How do we elect student leaders? (Standing Order C) - facilitated by Abi (SU President)
3. General tidying up! (Standing Order A + G: Right & Benefits and Academic Representation) - facilitated by Ellie D (Education Officer)

17.45 - Feedback on Proposals, and Voting

18.00 - Assembly Ends

Summary of Proposed Changes

Standing Order	Summary of Changes
A (Rights & Benefits)	Remove surplus text
B & D (Policy/Assembly)	Combining and simplifying process to create policy, includes consultation of Pres Comm for specific policies
C (Elections)	Tidying/clarifying. Moving from electing Student Trustees to appointing. Vote of No Confidence Procedure. Referendum Procedure. Use of Re-Open Nominations (RON) in elections.
G (Academic Reps)	Reduction and simplification. Proposal to house much more of the information about Academic Reps within Role Descriptions and memoranda, rather than Standing Orders.

Standing Order A: Rights & Benefits

What is this Standing Order for?

This Standing Order is the 'contents page' for the rest of the Standing Orders. It sets out the headline promises that Durham SU makes to its members, and the standards students should expect from each other and the students' union.

What will stay the same?

1. We want to keep the expectation that every member has the right to participate in our democracy and access our services, and has the right to influence and improve these benefits.
2. We want to make clear that opting out of membership of Durham SU is every student's right, but that has implications for their ability to access the benefits of membership.
3. We want to continue to set the standards members can expect of each other, with reference to the [Code of Conduct](#).

What are the proposed changes?

1. We think we should delete the bits which list what policies we will have, if it's the law that we'll have that policy, such as data protection or equal opportunities. We don't need to the Standing Orders to tell us to do what we already legally have to.

Why?

1. We want to make sure that members' democratic rights are known and respected, and every member has the right to participate in our democracy and access our services.
2. We're trying to keep the Standing Orders as 'lean' as possible because we think it'll be easier for students to understand and enforce their rights, if there's less opportunity to get confused by complicated text.

What are the important questions for this Standing Order?

1. Should we articulate rights or benefits for members in a better or different way?

Standing Orders B&D: Policy & Assembly

What is this Standing Order for?

Currently these are two separate (but interlinked) Standing Orders;

- B which defines 'Policy', who has the ability to set it and how long it lasts, and;
- D which describes how Assembly (the body that can create Policy) operates – and stresses that it should be an accessible, vibrant and open meeting.

Between them they describe the powers of a body of the Students' Union, and the result of those powers.

What will stay the same?

1. We want to keep the definition of 'policy' and describe how it can be created or changed by members – as well as where members can view current policies.
2. We want to clearly outline the powers of Assembly and how members can get involved.

What are the proposed changes?

1. The biggest change is in combining the two Standing Orders – bringing together a definition of policy alongside how members create it.
2. In line with the new Articles of Association, we would also like to update the definition of Assembly – it no longer requires a specific membership for example, instead every member of Durham SU is able to attend and participate.
 - a. We would like to move the operational elements of Assembly out of the Standing Order, so that the Standing Order focuses on the core powers and principles of the space rather than the logistics.
 - b. Our new Articles state that we must consult Common Rooms on decisions that affect Common Rooms/Colleges. We will state this requirement for any relevant Beliefs.
3. We'd like to remove the process for a Vote of No Confidence [VONC] from this Standing Order and hold it in the Elections & Referendums Standing Order.
4. We would like to remove 'Administrative Policy' from the Standing Orders as that is enforced by powers above and beyond this document. Similar to the logic for changes to Standing Order A – if it's the law that we'll have an 'Administrative Policy', such as data protection or equal opportunities, then we don't need to mention it here.
5. Finally, we would like to rename 'Political Policy' to 'Beliefs' - to better articulate their purpose. 'Belief' is already used in the current definition of 'Political Policy'.

Why?

1. We want the Standing Orders to be leaner and more usable – it is particularly important here now that Assembly is accessible to all members.
2. We want the Standing Order relating to Assembly to enable us to be more fluid and experimental in our approach – removing the specific operational details (and keeping them elsewhere) supports that ambition.

What are the important questions for this Standing Order?

1. Should we more specifically join these two Standing Orders given their connectivity?
2. Should we adopt more user-friendly language to better reflect Assembly being a more open space than it has been historically?
3. How should we ensure Pres Comm are consulted on policies that affect Common Rooms?

Feedback or questions welcome prior to Assembly via dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk

Standing Order C: Elections & Referendums

What is this Standing Order for?

This Standing Order explains how elections and appointments are made for Full-Time and Part-Time Officers, Student Trustees, NUS representatives and student positions on university committees. It also covers how all students can feed into the SU's beliefs via referendums.

What will stay the same?

1. Other than Student Trustees, we will elect or appoint student leaders as before.
2. The same complaints process and requirements for guidance will exist for SU elections.
3. Students will still be able to articulate beliefs in an all-student vote.

What are the proposed changes?

1. We think Student Trustee roles should be advertised, and interviewed against criteria, rather than elected.
2. We'd like to understand what students think the benefit of 'Re-Open Nominations' (RON, which functions as a candidate) is to the electorate, the students' union, and democratic participation. Is it better, or different, to have an option to abstain from voting?
3. We'd like to include the overview for how a referendum is called and held.
4. We'd like to add the process for a Vote of No Confidence [VONC] to this Standing Order, where previously it was held in the Assembly Standing Order.

Why?

1. Student Trustees help ensure that Durham SU is well governed. This is a distinct role, which is different to a student representative or student activist. This means Student Trustees don't have the right to further an agenda on behalf of student voters, so it isn't right to use a manifesto and election as an appointment method. Instead, it makes sense to appoint based on skills. We also know from candidate feedback that standing in a cross-campus election puts lots of good candidates off from participating. We're confident that we'd be better able to get a diverse range of views and people via an interview process.
2. If the RON election candidate wins an election, it causes no person to be elected to the position; a RON victory doesn't actually imply or require that another election is held, and the evidence suggests that a RON victory makes it very hard to attract candidates in another election, assuming there's time and capacity to re-run the election. A vacant position means that the work usually done by that role isn't done. We understand that there may be value in voters being able to express a lack of support for nominated candidates (perhaps in an abstain option) but would like to understand the positive reasons for a RON candidate being included in all elections.
3. Detail about referendums was previously held in the old Articles of Association but is not included in the new ones. We need to make sure this information is somewhere.
4. Previously, Assembly could hold a VONC in a Student Officer. This made sense when Assembly was made up of elected members, but now that any students can attend, it is open for misuse. We believe it should only be possible to express a desire to remove Student Officers from their position by an equivalent body to that which elected them, in other words, by a cross-campus vote.

What are the important questions for this Standing Order?

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1. Is it better for Student Trustees to be appointed rather than elected?
2. How does a RON candidate contribute to a thriving democratic culture and fair elections?

Standing Order G: Academic Reps

What is this Standing Order for?

This Standing Order outlines the various forms of Academic Representative supported by the Students' Union, and summarises their recruitment and duties.

What will stay the same?

1. The Standing Order will still state the Student Unions' commitment to having student-led Academic Representation.
2. Basic expectations of students holding these positions will still be outlined.

What are the proposed changes?

1. We are proposing stripping away lots of specifics featured in the current Standing Order:
 - a. How the Reps are put into post
 - b. The full list of types and titles of Reps

Why?

This Standing Order is not the reason we have Academic Reps (it could be deleted entirely and they would still exist).

In part, we want to make these changes to the Standing Order as it is incorrect in lots of cases, but mostly to afford ourselves space for future creativity and exploration with the Rep system. We believe that moving things like Role Descriptions, Recruitment Timelines (and method) into other spaces [the Students' Union website, an Academic Rep Handbook etc.] will enable us to improve our offer.

In the longer term, we are interested in exploring something along the lines of a written *Partnership Agreement* or *Memorandum of Understanding* with the University that better holds both parties to account when it comes to ensuring strong and impactful systems for student voice and representation in academic matters.

What are the important questions for this Standing Order?

1. Are the Standing Orders the most appropriate space to hold our commitment(s) to Academic Reps?
2. Should we pursue a more co-created vision for Academic Representation with the University?

Key terms used in our Standing Orders

Policy – a statement of the will or belief of an organisation.

Administrative policy – at Durham SU we use this term to refer to policy that aids the day-to-day running of the students' union, rather than a political belief or action. It could include something like a Data Protection Policy, or our Annual Leave Policy for staff members.

RON – RON stands for Re-Open Nominations, and is a function currently included on the SU election ballot. RON acts as a candidate, and therefore can “win” an election. If RON were to win the election, that means none of the student candidates are elected, but it doesn't guarantee the election is re-run.

Abstain – this means to intentionally not vote in an election or other decision. If an option to abstain were included on a ballot, it would not act as a candidate and would not be able to “win” an election. It would, however, provide a clear measure of dissatisfaction.

Student Trustee – [Student trustees](#) help to ensure that Durham SU is well governed. This is a distinct role, which is different to a student representative or a student activist. A Trustee deliberates and decides with the rest of the Board about the best way to deliver Durham SU's purpose. And rather than being accountable to a constituency, the Board of Trustees is collectively accountable to the Students' Union's regulators – Durham University and the Charity Commission.

Vote of no confidence – this is a formal way in which a body expresses that they have no confidence in a leader.