

**Durham Students' Union  
Assembly Minutes of the last Meeting**

Thursday 4 February 2021, Virtual meeting, Zoom

**Item A - Welcome**

ST opened the meeting, welcoming members and attendees, explaining zoom etiquette, outlining that no offensive or unacceptable behavior would be accepted and would result in being removed from the meeting.

**Item B - Minutes of the meeting on 26 November 2020**

No amendments to minutes of the last meeting.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

**Item C - Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest**

There were no apologies or conflicts of interest.

**Item D – Chairs Election**

ST explained there had been no nomination for Chair of Assembly.

ST will continue to Chair the meeting until someone is elected.

**Item E – Governance and Grants Election**

James Adamson hosted for Governance and Grants Student Group Position.

Voting ballots will be circulated to members by email and the results will be emailed to members and attendees of the meeting.

**Item F – Officer Updates**

ES had been working on an Accommodation stance for 2021, which outlines the need for the government to step in and support students, compassionate understanding to be shown by landlords and PBSA providers towards students, and for the university to give clarity over term 3 especially around accommodation charges. A letter has been drafted and addressed to the UK government asking them to support NUS's demands to refund students for private accommodation, or provide support to landlords so that they can be flexible in offering rebates.

NH had been working with the Postgraduate Academic Officer, Alan Houston and Michael Gilmore to secure a safety-net policy that will protect students. Still working on the Durham Decolonise network as there is another series of workshops taking place this term that I am part of. Beginning to start advertising the decolonise faculty/ department internship in the next couple of weeks so that we can recruit, interview and train those who are selected for the role.

SMc had been in discussions around Durham's adoption of safety net policies along with the Undergraduate Academic Officer, which began by drafting suggestions for the University on ahead of a meeting with Alan Houston (PVC Education) and Michael Gilmore (Academic Registrar). A draft policy from the University went to the Teaching Recovery Group where multiple amendments and changes were proposed. The conversation has continued in Provost Board, further meetings with Alan and Michael and in numerous meetings with other members of University staff. Senate has agreed the policy and this should be communicated to students soon.

AM had met with the Vice-Chancellor to ask him to declare a climate emergency, update the University's environmental sustainability leadership structure and urgently modernise how Durham approaches the climate crisis. He agreed to organise two blue skies thinking sessions with UEC, on the topic of environmental sustainability. The first of these was attended by the Opportunities Officer and President. There was consensus that this needed further urgent action. The democracy review report has now been published and there's an article on the website explaining my next steps. Overall have received positive feedback from students recognising the reports merits and there's a real appetite to engage with creating change.

ST had been working on the Culture Commission and the first phase of research for this has now been completed. It is very encouraging to see continue student engagement in this work. Student engagement has been overwhelmingly positive and thorough. As anticipated, the appetite for this Commission still grows and students will want this work to continue as a priority. Stage 2 of the research will commence this term so there is still plenty of opportunity for more students to shape the overall report. Looking to make a more permeant place for the Culture Commission, in SU strategy so that this work continues and grows.

### **Item G – Committee Updates**

Updates were provided from:

- JCR Presidents Committee
- MCR Presidents Committee
- Societies Committee
- Union Rep Committee
- DUCK
- Governance and Grants Committee
- Academic Affairs Committee)

### **Item H – Association Updates**

Updates were provided from:

- Students with Disabilities Association (SwDA)
- Women's Association
- LGBT+ Association
- Durham People of Colour Association (DPoCA)
- Working Class Students' Association
- Trans Association

(Apologies from International Students' Association and Mature Students' Association)

**\*\*ACCESS BREAK\*\***

### **Item I – Freedom of Speech Policy**

AM presented the policy and stated Durham University have recently revised their Freedom of Expression Code of Practice and Durham SU as a separate entity needs its own Freedom of Speech Policy. The Policy pulls together what is already happening and will ensure that appropriate approval processes will be carried out for any external guest speakers.

Concerns were expressed that a specific reading of the policy might exclude certain groups (including Extinction Rebellion) altogether, and clarity was sought around this. Clarity was also requested around the phrase "breaking the law" in terms of how this worked regarding incitement.

ST moves to a vote.

**The motion passes.**

### **Item J – End the Advertising of Unaffordable Housing**

KE presented the motion and said that it is inappropriate for Durham SU to be advertising private accommodation during the Covid-19 crisis. Private landlords have refused to rebate rent to Durham students and it is confusing and hypocritical to be criticising them with one hand and advertising them with the other.

Charlie McKeeven, who was in attendance of the meeting spoke against the motion, stating that students should be given the option and some might choose luxury accommodation.

ST moves to a vote

**The motion passes.**

### **Item K – The Membership of Assembly should be Publically Known**

KE presented the motion and stated the membership of assembly is confusing and not widely known amongst the student body. Assembly notes that the majority of students would not be able to name their college representative and even fewer would be able to name their faculty rep. Assembly membership should be visible and accessible to students and Officers should investigate the possibility of making assembly membership visible online.

There were reservations raised from members of Assembly as some students may not want certain information being known on a public platform.

ST moves to a vote

**The motion passes.**

### **Item L – Intersectionality Week**

The proposer of the motion Redrei Visaya was not present in the meeting. Assembly members voted to roll the motion forward to the next meeting.