

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

Thursday 26 November 2020, Virtual meeting, Zoom

**Item A - Welcome**

ST opened the meeting, welcoming members and explained zoom etiquette, outlining that no offensive or unacceptable behavior would be accepted and members would be removed.

**Item B - Minutes of the meeting on 14 May 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ST explained there had been 3 nominees for Chair of Assembly but before the meeting, two of the nominees had withdrawn their nominations and one was not eligible to be Chair of Assembly due to holding another elected position.

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

**Item E – Elections Update**

ST provided an update on elections and stated that Durham SU will elect five Officer Trustees, and four student trustees, in Epiphany term. The Trustees intend that students elected to the position of trustee will immediately begin a term from March 2021 to July 2021, then continue into a term from August 2021 to July 2022.

The Returning Officer and the Durham SU trustees will publish guidance further to the elections before the end of Michaelmas term.

**Assembly confirmed Peter Robertson as the Returning Officer.**

**Item F – The Future of Education under COVID-19**

NH presented the item and explained that all students have seen disruption to their studies due to the Covid-19 pandemic in some way. Students had the option this year to study in person or online only. Blended learning should continue but with greater focus on student choice and flexibility. The University needs to address ongoing issues of digital poverty and should ensure that study spaces are open and safe for students to use. There should also be increased efforts to make course material more accessible to all students.

SMc added that Postgraduate researchers who teach should continue to be properly trained, supported and paid where they are involved in teaching and academic support work and an automatic one-week extension should be provided, when it is asked for by students, as well as the re-introduction of the No Detriment Policy for both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students, similar to that of academic year 2019/2020. The University should provide appropriate equivalent mitigations for postgraduate researchers.

ST moves to a vote (zoom poll opens)

**The motion passes.**

### **Item G – Housing and Accommodation through COVID-19**

SMc presented the item on behalf on Ewan Swift, who was not present at the meeting and said that Durham University should ensure that students who cannot return home over Christmas do not face additional accommodation fees for 2020/201 academic year and to terminate tenancy agreements early for students who cannot, or do not wish to, return to Durham for Epiphany Term 2021. PBSA providers should also terminate tenancy agreements early for students who cannot, or do not wish to, return to Durham for Epiphany Term 2021. Durham SU aim to renew the Student-Landlord Pledge and continue work with private landlords and agents to ensure student tenants are treated fairly and with compassion and flexibility and will continue to promote tenants' rights and the prioritisation of tenants' safety.

ST moves to a vote (zoom poll opens)

**The motion passes.**

### **Item H – Wider Student Experience through COVID-19**

AM presented the item and explained that the pandemic has limited the ability for WSE to take place as normal and many activities will need to be delivered online. Many students value face-to-face WSE as beneficial to their mental health and some students will be unable to return to Durham for Epiphany term and will only experience WSE online. The University should provide both online and in-person WSE opportunities and provide high quality online options that can remain passed the pandemic. All WSE activities should take place in a controlled, risk-assessed manner. The University should ensure a balance remains between WSE opportunities and Academic Commitments. This includes a guarantee that Academic workload remains the same as with previous years and Wednesday afternoons remain free. Support services for students, both across the University and in individual colleges, should be appropriately funded and supported during this period, especially with regard to increasing their visibility to students. The Students' Union will provide resources and training to Student Group Exec members to ensure they are confident in running safe and inclusive online events.

ST moves to a vote (zoom poll opens)

**The motion passes.**

### **Item I – Cut the Rent**

EJ presented the motion and stated that College accommodation fees cost well above the average maintenance loan for students and have risen above inflation for many years. Durham University has significantly cut, reduced and centralised staffing and facilities within colleges – such as portering, cleaning and catering – to the detriment of student experience.

**The motion passes.**

### **Item J – Condemn the actions of Durham Union Society**

Tristan Pahl and James Adamson joined the meeting for the motion.

Yash Raju presented the motion and stated the Durham Union Society (DUS) has failed to prevent and effectively penalise incidents of racism/misogyny amongst both its membership and leadership. The assembly notes that solutions suggested to reform the DUS have been unsuccessful in transforming the institution into an organisation which protects its membership and the wider student body from discrimination. The SU should ban DUS from participating in events and strongly encourage Sabbatical Officers not to participate in DUS events. The assembly also resolves to publicly separate itself from the DUS by not advertising events held by the DUS or promoting the organisation to its members. The assembly also resolves to not host events of the DUS in Dunelm House.

James Adamson spoke in favour of the motion passing.

Tristan Pahl spoke on behalf of Durham Union Society against the motion passing.

ST moves to a vote (zoom poll opens)

**The motion passes.**

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

### **Item K – Officer Updates**

AM confirmed that the Democracy Review survey is now live, having launched on the 18 November. This is projected to be open until the 9 December. MiraGold will be conducting at least 18 focus groups, working with a student researcher who has also now been recruited. The new lockdown guidance forced all Durham SU groups to stop group face-to-face activity and have asked the University to fund creative outdoor socially-distanced projects next year such as outdoors calisthenics equipment or outdoor light exhibitions. Invited every student group exec to meet with me over two days, which led to some insightful conversations. Planned an environment forum across the different Durham groups which should occur in the first week of December, to set annual objectives for Durham campus community.

SMc had listened to student opinion on teaching and learning during Covid-19, and developed a stance on what students should be able to expect from the University. Due to the pandemic, the number of peer-to-peer discussions and support that usually take place has been detrimentally impacted. I have raised this in a number of University spaces, including the Teaching and Research Recovery Groups, which has facilitated discussions about both how departments and student representatives can facilitate this aspect of Postgraduate life. Alongside the work on communities, I have been looking at how we can support Postgraduate Mental Health. This is something that I have been raising at University meetings and started to put some plans in place for the rest of term.

NH stated that the series of workshops which are being hosted by Tony Fawcett have begun which means that departments are getting the opportunity to talk to each other and the DSU about good practice and what steps need to be taken to move the Decolonise initiative forward. Have been in multiple conversations about academic support and how that can be improved and what information regarding wellbeing needs to be on the DU website. Also had a drop-in session alongside PG Academic Officer where students could ask us questions or tell us their concerns etc.

ES had been a part of the Covid-19 Christmas Working Group and has been pushing for better communication, more clarity, and greater focus on scenario planning the offers that may be available over Christmas and January. Have been doing research into housing and accommodation schemes and initiatives at other Universities and seeing how they could be implemented in Durham. Have gained backing to push for the implementation of Active Bystander Training for all students next year.

ST confirmed that the feedback form for the Culture Commission is being launched next Monday, one opportunity for students to shape the commission and have their experience heard whether it be positive, negative or somewhere in between on what 'Durham's Culture' is. W/C 30 the commission will be holding contribution sessions. Mass testing is now being carried out, with a Self-test model being used. Students and staff watch a short video on duo, take a quiz to check understanding and then take the test. Will receive results themselves straight away. Started the recruitment process for the new Vice-Chancellor.

### **Item L – Committee Updates**

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

(Apologies from Academic Affairs Committee)

### **Item M – Association Updates**

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

(Apologies from Trans Association and International Students' Association)