

Durham Students' Union
Assembly Minutes of the last Meeting

Thursday 29 October 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.

JMc the previous year Chair of Assembly addressed members and gave a brief speech about his time as chair.

Item B – Introduction to Assembly

ST provided an introduction to Assembly for new members.

Item C - Minutes of the meeting on 14 May 2020

No amendments to minutes of the last meeting.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Item D - Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest

There were no apologies or conflicts of interest.

Item E – Chairs Election

ST explained that there had been no nominations for Chair so this would roll over to next meeting.

ST will Chair the meeting until someone is elected.

Item F – Open Positions Election

ST explained Assembly members will now elect Assembly Open Positions. There are 4 Open Positions.

For all elections, candidates will be given 30 seconds to speak then voting would take place via form sent via email using the ballots sent out yesterday and votes for all elections will be then counted in the access break and presented after the break.

Open Position

One candidate (Silas Welsh) running for this position, plus RON.
SW delivers hust for Open Position.

Postgraduate Position

One candidate (Panagiota Karadimitriou) running for this position, plus RON.

Panagiota Karadimitriou was unable to attend the Assembly meeting but provided a pre-written submission which was sent to members in advance of the meeting.

Open Position (Women/Carer)

Three candidates (Caitlin Kay Guibout, Miya Fowler, Veena Tadikonda) running for this position, plus RON.

CG delivers hust for Open Position (Women/Carer)

Miya Fowler and Veena Tadikonda were unable to attend the Assembly meeting but provided a pre-written submission which was sent to members in advance of the meeting.

Open Position (First year undergraduate)

Six candidates (Redrei Visaya, Noor Afshan, Jon Chan, Kaya Smith, Brandon Layton, Samya Amir) running for this position, plus RON.

RV delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

JC delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

KS delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

BL delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

Noor Afshan and Samya Amir were unable to attend the Assembly meeting but provided a pre-written submission which was sent to members in advance of the meeting.

Item G – Governance and Grants Committee Election

ST explains that Assembly members will now elect Governance and Grants Committee positions.

Student Group Positions

There is one candidate (Kate Little) running for three seats, plus RON.

KL delivers hust for Student Group Position.

Open Places

There is one candidate (Yash Raju) running for two seat, plus RON.

YR delivers hust for Open Position.

Item H – Board Update

AM presented the update and said the Trustees discussed the response to a consultation on a proposal to recruit student leaders to the Board as an interim temporary solution in 2020/2021 but after discussion decided that Student Trustee elections would be moved to Feb instead of an appointment process, with an immediate start in March. Which would mean there would be no Student Trustees in place until the election.

The trustees agreed to amend the Standing Orders to enable a meeting of Assembly to proceed, and a motion is presented to Assembly for ratification.

The trustees agreed to prioritise the response to Covid-19, the review of Durham SU's

democratic framework, and the President's campaign to change Durham's culture in the term ahead, recognising that other activities would need to be renegotiated.

Item I – Officer Updates

ST has commissioned a report on Durham's culture from a student perspective. This Culture Commission will give Durham Students a chance to shape Durham University not only in their image but in the image of what they should be. A university-wide student survey will be launched allowing students to express their views on the "Durham Culture". Once major themes are extracted from the survey, 10 commissioners, chosen by ST and an independent commissioner, will chair focus groups to give students more opportunities to articulate their views, in a safe and constructive environment. Following the survey and focus groups, the commissioners will also develop 10 recommendations and sub-recommendations for long term, sustainable and systemic cultural change.

ES said the first priority this year is to address the quality of student housing in Durham, as well as the "housing rush" which has been identified as an overwhelming stressor when it comes to student mental health. The second priority this year is to address the toxic cultures that exist in Durham and ensure that they are properly addressed, and push to university to put proactive measures in place for students to both feel safe and be safe whether on campus or virtually. Final priority surrounds the student support system and making sure that it actually works for students. This means greater consistency across departments, colleges and other functions, and ensuring that the diverse range of student needs are catered to.

NH had been in with discussions with Alan Houston and other University senior leaders regarding the move to online teaching and the issues that this has posed, how the university plans on navigating these issues and how the university is going to ensure that the quality of online teaching is at a high standard. Meeting with the UCU to discuss their stance towards face-to-face teaching. Organisation and execution of Decolonise Workshops, managed by Tony Fawcett and Sam Nolan. The first one will be on 10 November; will be on a panel discussing the decolonising of our curriculum and what this means, along with Dan Taki, President of DPOCA.

SMc had been sitting on the Teaching and Research Recovery Groups which were set up to ensure that these aspects of University life can continue in Michaelmas term. Covid-19 has impacted the Postgraduate Communities in Durham. Mental health and loneliness have already been established as a big area of concern for Postgraduate Students, which will only be amplified this year so student leaders have been working on new ways to engage Postgraduate students in the Durham Postgraduate Community. Attended University Committee meetings including Senate, Student Support and Wellbeing Sub-Committee, Research Degrees Committee, Learn Ultra Steering Group, alongside meeting members of University staff individually.

AM had been working on the Democracy Review which will be discussed in a separate agenda item later in the meeting. Hosted a networking event for all societies to attend and interact to flag concerns more informally before term began. Now that a student group committee has been elected, will be working with them to get more student group forums running, to provide a clear opportunity for student groups to feed in. Worked with Durham Market to advertise their new low carbon local delivery scheme to the colleges, personally delivering their leaflets to half of all colleges and extending their market days to be over two weekends specifically for this year's more spread out Fresher's arrival dates. Helped form a national group of SU officers implementing sustainable changes to their student unions.

Item J – Committee Updates

- JCR PresComm
- MCR PresComm
- Societies Committee
- Union Rep Committee

(Apologies from DUCK and Academic Affairs Committee)

Governance and Grants Committee members were elected at this meeting.

Item K – 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)

****ACCESS BREAK****

ST announced the results of Open Positions and Governance and Grants Committee elections:

- Open Position - Silas Welsh
- Postgraduate Position – Panagiota Karadimitriou
- Women/Carer Position - Caitlyn Guibout
- First year undergraduate Position – Redrei Visaya
- Governance and Grants Student Group Position – Kate Little
- Governance and Grants Open Position - Yash Raju

Item L – Amendment to Standing Order D

SMc presented the item and explained that the current Standing Orders don't allow for Assembly online as this is not written into the standing orders so this amendment will allow for that to happen for 20/21 academic year.

Currently still trying to find a way for Assembly to be accessible for all but it's needs to be a safe space and voting by email can't happen, so there are a lot of things to factor in.

Members were asked to send any ideas on how this can be done be sent to dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk

ST moves to the vote (zoom poll initiated)

The motion passes.

Item M – Democracy Review Update

AM presented the item and explained that Durham SU are undertaking a democracy review to interrogate, reform and change the democratic structures in the interests of students. In addressing structural change, we really need to be committed to thinking outside the box and being prepared not just to tweak or copy what is done in other students' unions or in other Durham elections, but give students the space to share their thoughts and be creative.

The survey is nearly ready to release to all students, to help get a sense of direction and the balances that people want to see within the union.

CG queried why motions that had been previously submitted last year had been rejected, when it was advised that they would be included in the next agenda.

AM explained that Durham SU is currently working on priorities and the democracy review is one of these, so making little changes throughout the year would distract from the overall review and could be changed at the end of the year once the review is complete, so it is about prioritising time for this year.

SW asked what the scale of the review was.

AM explained that the review was about changing the way decisions are made and the way students are represented and implementing changes to Durham SU governance.

Item N – Amendment to Equality and Diversity: *SU Core Policy*

JS presented the item and explained that Durham should be inclusive and promote equal opportunity for all. Diversity should be celebrated, and Durham should be a welcoming environment where students, staff and visitors feel safe and can express themselves. However, historically, under-represented groups¹ have experienced exclusion, marginalisation, abuse, violence, toxicity and discrimination across all sectors in society, whilst traditional power structures have privileged white, cisgender, heterosexual males with no disability. Durham must continue to strive for the liberation of under-represented groups and challenge the existing cultural and structural inequalities which could prevent, or limit, this liberation.

ST moves to the vote (zoom poll initiated)

The motion passes.
