

Durham Students' Union Assembly Agenda

Tuesday 3rd December 2019, 18:30, PCL048

Time	Subject	Who	Paper
18:30 18:30	A. Welcome	Chair	
18:31 18:33	B. Minutes of the meeting on 7 th November	Chair	UA/1920/12
18:33 18:35	C. Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest	Chair	

Routine Business

18:35 18:37	D. Board Update	Kate McIntosh	UA/1920/13
18:37 18:40	E. Election of Vice-Chair	Chair	UA/1920/14
18:40 19:00	F. Officer Updates	Officers	UA/1920/15
19:00 19:20	G. Committee Updates	Committee Chairs*	UA/1920/16

****Access Break****

19:30 19:50	H. Association Updates	Association President**	UA/1920/17
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Items for Discussion

19:50 20:00	I. Durham University is Institutionally Disablist	Jess Madden	UA/1920/18
20:00 20:10	J. Fight the housing rush	Tom Chapman	UA/1920/19
20:10 20:30	K. Discussion regarding Assembly format (Facilitated by Dani Beckett SU Staff member)		UA/1920/20

**Academic Affairs Committee, DUCK Committee, Governance & Grants Committee, JCR Presidents' Committee, MCR Presidents' Committee, Societies Committee and Union Rep Committee.*

*** Students with Disabilities Association, Durham Women's Association, LGBT+ Association, Durham People of Colour Association, Working Class Students' Association, Trans Association, International Students' Association, Mature Students' Association. ,*

Assembly is committed to making its meetings accessible to persons with disabilities. If you consider yourself to have any access or reasonable adjustment needs, please contact the SU governance account: dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk at least 2 days in advance of the meeting to make arrangements.

Assembly Minutes: 7th November 2019

ITEM A: Welcome

KMc opened first assembly of 2019/20, introduced themselves and offered an outline for the meeting. KMc explained that they would be chairing until a new chair was elected during the meeting.

ITEM B: Minutes of the meeting on June 20th

Change accepted regarding the membership of UEC.

Minutes accepted by Assembly

ITEM C: Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest

Apologies received from: SU Opportunities Officer (JD), JCR PresComm Chair (CE),

No conflicts of interest declared.

ITEM D: Introduction to Assembly

KMc introduces Assembly and explains the purpose of Assembly and how Assembly meetings work. KMc goes through the typical running order and an example motion debate. They explain that anyone can submit a motion to Assembly, and how.

KMc asks that members use BSL (British Sign Language) applause, and explains what this means.

KMc reminds members of the opportunity to use Procedural Motions and how they can do this.

ITEM E: Election of Chair

KMc explains that a new Chair will now be elected. Each candidate has 3 minutes to deliver husts to Assembly members. KHB and JM are the two candidates running for Chair.

KHB delivered hust to Assembly members.

JM delivered hust to Assembly members.

KMc invites questions from the room.

TP asks how candidates would handle disagreement and keep Assembly calm, given that at times, Assembly can become heated.

JM responds that they would ensure everyone is given the opportunity to share their own views, whilst maintaining neutrality as Chair.

KHB: Agrees that it's important for everyone to know that they will have the opportunity to share their views at some point. Also echoes that they would always remain neutral as Chair.

KMc explains the election process and asks that voting members place their ballot into the box at the front of the room.

ITEM F: Election of Governance and Grants and Assembly Open Positions

KMc explains that Assembly members will now elect Governance and Grants and Assembly Open Positions. There are 4 Open Positions and 3 Governance and Grants positions to be elected.

- Open Position

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

JM delivers hust for Open Position.

KMc invites questions; none asked.

- Open Position (First year undergraduate)

Two candidates running for this position, plus RON.

HH delivers hust.

SW delivers hust.

KMc invites questions.

TP asks what candidates believe is the biggest issue facing first year students at Durham.

SW answers that they believe confusion caused by inconsistent information sharing by the University was a big issue for first year students, and that this contributed to feeling overwhelmed. They say that this process needs to be refined by colleges and the University.

HH answers that they believe the settling in process is a significant issue for first year students, as they're aware of many students feeling homesick and combatting 'imposter syndrome'. They believe that the (already good) welfare system at Durham could be improved to better support students during the settling in period.

- Open Position (Women/Carer)

Two candidates running for this position, plus RON. KMc explains that neither candidate is able to attend Assembly today – CL to read their pre-submitted husts.

CL reads husts on behalf of absent candidates, EG and RM.

- Postgraduate Position

One candidate running for this position, plus RON.

YZ delivers hust.

KMc invites questions – none asked.

- Governance and Grants Positions

Three candidates (plus RON) running for three seats. KMc explains that none of the candidates are able to attend Assembly today, so they will read their pre-submitted husts.

KMc reads husts on behalf of candidates MA, JT, GD.

KMc explains that one candidate has withdrawn from the election at late notice, so Assembly members should disregard their name on the ballot paper.

Results of Chair Election are announced by KMc. 25 votes were cast and JM has been elected as Chair of Assembly in the first round with 14 votes.

JM becomes Chair for second half of meeting.

ITEM G: Officer Priority Update

JM explains that Officers will now deliver updates on their priorities for the 2019/20 academic year.

KMc (President) updated on their priorities for the year (affordable accommodation fees for all, platforming international students and combatting violence harassment). Also updated on plans for the general election, UCU strike action and Brexit as well as committees they sit on.

AM (Welfare and Liberation Officer) updated on their priorities – an inclusive Durham, Postgraduate Welfare and Liberation.

SJA (UG Academic Officer) updated on priorities – decolonisation, academic support and reforming pedagogy.

DE (PG Academic Officer) updated on priorities – “year of the PGT”, Postgraduate access and participation and (hidden) academic costs.

JM explains that JD (Opportunities Officer) has sent apologies for the meeting, but they have sent a video update for Assembly members.

Assembly receives video update from JD outlining their priorities:

JM asks for questions from Assembly.

TC asks what the SU did to participate in the national day of action against rising accommodation costs in October.

KMc responds that the SU supported students in creating banners for a University-wide banner drop, and added that the aim was to create as much media attention as possible.

ITEM H: Board Report

KMc presents the Board Report and highlights the Quality Students' Union mark received by Durham SU. Assembly is asked to ratify CA and CN to the Board.

No questions.

Motion passes.

ITEM I: Election Rules

- Election Rules revision

KMc presents motion. Assembly is asked to consider that New Rules 18 and 20 are incompatible with the SU's Articles of Association, Code of Practice and statutory and regulatory guidance and that New Rules 18 and 20 contradict existing Standing Orders.

Assembly is asked to resolve that New Rules 18 and 20 are deleted from the proposal for new elections regulations, which are due to be considered by Durham SU trustees. This would mean that Officers and trustees would not be required to remain neutral during election periods. KMc adds that if this motion did not pass, then the Board of Trustees would be required to interpret this inconsistency.

ML asks for clarification on what Assembly is voting on.

GH provides clarification

JP asks what Rules 18 and 20 are.

JM explains that the rules are outlined in the Assembly papers, which were circulated prior to the meeting.

ML asks for clarity on whether SU Facebook accounts could be used to promote candidates in elections

KMc explains that SU resources can never be used to endorse candidates during an election

Assembly member states that Student Group Committee felt that New Rules 18 and 20 were useful and asked whether these rules would be replaced.

KMc responds that whilst they cannot answer that question specifically, there would be no reason as to why an amendment couldn't be proposed.

Assembly member asks what KMc would do to ensure that an element of neutrality would be upheld

KMc responds that the motion is at Assembly as not all necessary information was brought to Assembly previously. KMc adds that Assembly has the power to vote on what they believe is the right thing to do.

TC speaks against the motion. Says that motion should not have been brought to Assembly, and that neutrality is needed for a free and fair election. Adds that other SUs have overcome such a contradiction.

JM asks that GH offers clarification.

GH explains the difference between the Standing Orders and the Articles of Association. Notes that Assembly cannot vote to adapt the Articles, as these legally underpin how the SU operates.

JMa speaks for the motion. Explains that SU reps [within colleges] have to remain neutral because they run polling stations – something with SU Officers and trustees do not do. The motion must pass for election rules to go forward. JMa adds that Durham SU's Articles are different to the Articles of other SUs, meaning that we must do things differently here.

Assembly member speaks against the motion. States that policies/manifestos can be questioned whilst maintaining neutrality. Believes that 'neutrality' as a concept needs to be defined so as to resolve any confusion over the concept.

JMa asks whether they can respond. JM says they cannot.

JP asks why this contradiction wasn't raised when the amendment was originally brought to Assembly

KMc acknowledges that it should have been, and that the motion has been brought back to Assembly because Governance and Grants Committee did not provide the necessary information at the last Assembly

DE adds that SU Officers and trustees are elected, and thus requiring them to remain neutral in elections suggests that their opinions on who should proceed them in their roles is not valued. DE says that whilst they disagree with the concept of neutrality in principle, they respect the will of Assembly.

CG asks why SU Officers should not be neutral, when SU reps are encouraged to promote informed decision making and the need for students to consider all candidates.

JM moves to summaries.

TC summarises against the motion. Says that the integrity of Assembly is the principle issue here and that Assembly passed the motion previously. Adds that whilst they understand the sensitivity of the issue, that as a representative, they would be uncomfortable to see this motion pass.

KMc summarises for the motion. Notes that this policy has come back to Assembly so that Assembly can make a fully informed decision. Reiterates that any inconsistencies will be interpreted by the Board, and that Officer and trustee neutrality [Rules 18 and 20] create inconsistency.

JM moves to vote. Motion falls.

- Association Elections that work for all

JMa presents motion on behalf of FS. Assembly is asked to amend previous policy so that only Association Presidents are required to be elected via cross-campus ballots. Associations would then have opportunity to decide how other executive positions are elected.

SJA requests clarification on whether the recent Women's Association elections were an issue.

JMa explains that Associations are awaiting elections guidance from the SU, and is unsure of the situation surrounding the Women's Association elections.

KMc speaks opposing the motion. Believes that cross-campus elections are more accessible to students and that Assembly have already voted in favour of this principle. KMC says that the SU can work on the administrative issues identified without passing this motion.

DE speaks in favour of the motion. Says that nothing KMc has said is inconsistent with voting for this motion and that the motion gives Associations the opportunity to choose how they run their elections, which is a positive.

SJA speaks opposing the motion. SJA notes that they are the proposer of the original motion passed by Assembly in 2018/19 academic year. Says that students cannot access Association elections [if they are not cross-campus ballots] and that this makes elections unrepresentative. Problems identified previously can be overcome without this amendment.

KMC summarises for opposition. Says that the principle remains that executive positions should be elected representatively.

JMa summarises in favour – currently unfilled positions need to be filled as Associations need functioning execs. Says that this is not a perfect solution, but can prevent Associations from collapsing.

JM moves to vote. Motion passes.

ITEM J: The Environment (Core Position)

TP presents position.

SJA presents amendment to position.

Assembly member asks why the Global South should specifically be recognised in the position.

SJA responds that climate change disproportionately affects people in the Global South and this is affecting them now. This is a result of colonisation, and the SU should recognise this.

JMa asks whether SJA feels that referring to the University's colonial past in the position could threaten the possibility of making progress in this area.

SJA disagrees and reiterates that the SU must recognise colonialism as a factor in climate change. The University's response to this should not be considered as a barrier to passing the motion.

JM moves to vote on amendment. Amendment passes.

JM moves to vote on position. Position passes.

ITEM K: Declaring a climate emergency.

TP presents motion.

TC asks what changes have been made to previous motion brought to Assembly in 2018/19 academic year.

TP explains that they have consulted with KMc and Students with Disabilities Association (SwDA) to streamline and edit the motion.

Assembly member asks whether the Sustainability Steering Group would be included in the implementation of motion's proposals

TP explains that the motion recommends improved liaison with the relevant University groups.

JM moves to vote. Motion passes.

ITEM L: Lobby landlords to accept International Guarantors

ML presents motion.

JM moves to vote. Motion passes.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Kate McIntosh

RE: Board Report

DATE: 3 December 2019

Report from the Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees has not met since the last meeting of Assembly, but two Committees have convened for the first time, and the trustees' report therefore gives Assembly insight into the discussions at these meetings.

People and Culture Committee

The People and Culture Committee met for the first time, and considered:

The Articles of Association; the trustees agreed to re-consider putting a proposal to amend the Articles of Association to referendum. The original case for reform was still valid, and more recently other matters had arisen which required reflection. The Board will therefore consider a proposal to amend the Articles at its January meeting.

The Elections Rules; the trustees considered a proposal from Assembly to amend the Elections Rules, and agreed to recommend the proposal to the University Secretary for her approval.

The trustees noted that the new Elections Rules were a clear improvement on the previous version but provisions were in tension with the existing Articles and Standing Orders. Article 4 provides that "If any dispute arises in relation to the interpretation of these articles or any of the Standing Orders it shall be resolved by the Board of Trustees." People and Culture Committee were therefore of the view that:

- All students, including Officers and trustees, were entitled to full participation in fair elections under rights protected by Article 15 and the Code of Practice.
- New Rules 18 to 20 had the effect of requiring Officers and trustees to 'remain neutral' on the outcome of every election, and this was inconsistent with the rights guaranteed under Article 15
- There is a reasonable interpretation that New Rules 18 to 20 frustrate the ability of Assembly to hold Officers to account under Article 94.7 as accountability questions asked to Officers would out of necessity be ruled out of order if an answer could influence democratic events.
- Notwithstanding the supremacy of the Articles over the Standing Orders, granted under Article 57, the existing Standing Orders were also incompatible with any 'neutrality' requirement.
- The practical reality of the Officers and trustees being 'neutral' for all times when a cross-campus election was underway (as described in New Rule 7) would mean that New Rules 18 to 20 would be in force for close to half of the academic year. This would significantly restrict the effectiveness of student representatives and frustrate much of Standing Order F, in particular F5 which provides for Officers to "promote and defend the rights of members and act in the best interest of the Union" and "uphold policy" *"at all times"* (italics added) and F5.14 which provides for the Officers to "[work] within the democratic structures to debate and discuss policies and issues and to implement policies".

People and Culture Committee therefore agreed that New Rules 18 to 20 could have no effect and would not be enforced by the Returning Officer.

Finally, People and Culture Committee noted the Chief Executive's Review and Objectives.

Fundraising Committee

The Fundraising Committee met for the first time, and considered:

DUCK development; including a report from the DUCK Chair of the success of student-led fundraising to date, and the plans for the year ahead.

Grant negotiation strategy; to support Durham SU in discussion with the University about continued funding for the students' union.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Kate McIntosh
RE: President's Report
DATE: 03 December 2019

Update on priorities:

Affordable accomodation for all

When I ran to be SU President, I knew we needed to change the RippedOff campaign to make it effective. Over the summer, after a lot of research, I decided that the most feasible and effective way to change Durham's accommodation fee system is to introduce differentiated fees – basically, a lower lowest fee, and more rooms at lower rates. Excitingly, this idea landed really well. This year, as a result of the efforts of current and previous SU Officers, and all of the students who joined the campaign effort, the university is launching an accomodation fee review that aims to cut the cost of rooms across Durham

I presented the Funding Gap report to University Executive Committee and the recommendations of the report – that we need to cut college costs and up financial support – were well-received. UEC agreed that we need to better understand how students fund their time at Durham, and supported the fact that we need to do more to support the students who fall into the Funding Gap. This includes changing the accomodation fee offer at Durham, to cut fees and make more rooms affordable to more students.

I have met with the majority of JCR Presidents to talk about differentiated fees, and start getting a bigger more accurate picture of how differentiated fees can work in Durham to make accomodation affordable for all.

I've also organised and led the re-launch of our Tenants' Union, which will give students the space and resources to challenge the broken housing market in Durham with the support of the SU.

Platforming international students

I've begun working on a piece of research into the experiences of international students, looking at expectation, belonging, integration in academic departments, wellbeing, and engagement with the SU. The first bit of this research is a survey which will open this term! I also attended the Global Strategy Group, where we discussed international student wellbeing and support statistics.

General updates:

UCU Strike

I've led the Officer team in responding to the UCU strike, negotiating with the University on the mitigations policy, creating resources and delivering information to students, and equipping student leaders with the know-how to respond to questions or queries for others during the strike period.

I've also been working on our action in support of the strike, alongside Sam and David, communicating with UCU and creating resources to aid political education.

General Election

The deadline to register to vote has passed and our Prove Them Wrong campaign has evolved into a campaign urging people to plan their vote, and prompt people to think about the issues that matter most to them. We're contacting all of the City of Durham parliamentary candidates and with key questions to answer on video, so that we can share all their responses with you. We've also facilitated Durham students being paid by Vote For Your Future to go out on the day of the register to vote deadline to get as many students registered as possible.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Sam Johnson-Audini
RE: UG Academic Officer Report
DATE: 03 December 2019

Update on priorities:

Decolonisation

- I have been researching other decolonising movements across the country, finding best practice for my decolonisation manifesto for Durham. As part of this, I have been in contact with other officers in other SUs working on decolonisation, as well as the NUS Black Students' Officer, to create a network of critical friends who are actively working in this area.
- I have met with the library to talk about their "broaden the bookshelf" campaign, where they will purchase books by traditionally un-represented authors in the academy when they are suggested by students, particularly LGBT+ authors, Authors of colour and disabled authors.
- I attended a meeting with the University's BAME staff network, to understand how the Su can support staff at the University and learn about their work both relating to and independent of decolonisation work.
- DPOCA hosted a decolonisation event, where I was able to speak to a wide range of students and academics about their responses to the decolonisation movement at Durham and what points they felt were important to include in the decolonise manifesto.

Academic support

- I have been researching which universities offer varying types of disability support, and, more importantly, how much it costs each student to access that support. Whilst many initial assessments at the University disability support services are free, many kinds of further assessments that will lead to a diagnosis can be prohibitively expensive for some students.

Reforming pedagogy

- I have been meeting with DCAD to discuss the future of the Foundation programme and how it can be changed to benefit those students who need it most to access a top quality education.

General updates:

- I invited NUS Trans Officer Eden Ladley to Durham, to give some training to the rest of the Officer team and SU staff. Having Eden to explain what the SU could do more of to support trans students meant that the SU now can take forward positive actions to be mindful of and include trans students better.
- Along with the rest of the officer team, I have been working with UCU to educate around the current strikes. I met Sarah Elton, head of DUCU, to do a Q&A session, which we then made available to students. I have on organised a teach-out to support UCU last week on themes important to the changing face of higher education- providing students with alternative sources of learning during the strikes. I support the strikes because the casualization of contracts has become an increasingly pressing problem in HE. Lecturers are increasingly being placed on casual contracts, which are often short term and expect an ever growing labour contribution for the same salary. Staff's working conditions are our learning conditions and we need to protect both for a well-rounded education.
- Claire Sosienski-Smith from NUS joined us last week for a "Your Education Matters" talk, setting out the NUS' plans for a National Education Service, which will be funded, accessible for all, and available for life – not just while you're in formal education. Students from Durham gave their views to help the NUS shape this policy, and learn more about the current structure of Higher Education in England.
- As well as this, I have been encouraging students to register to vote in the snap general election, so that everyone can have their voice heard and contribute to the conversation about what matters to them most.

TO: Assembly

FROM: David Evans, Postgraduate Academic Officer

RE: Postgraduate Academic Officer Report

DATE: 03/12/19

Update on priorities:

Year of the PGT

I have been busy working on the Year of the PGT, a priority that has taken me across Durham and around the country. I have received approval (and funding!) to create a PGT advisory board, which will inform the SU's thinking around PGT students and how best to support them. There are currently 5 students who have agreed to take part, with a further 15 places remaining. If you are a PGT student and want to get involved, please email me for further information. We have also supported the PG open day that the University hosted, in order to promote the SU to prospective students and get them more involved from day 1. Aside from that, two weeks ago I visited 2 PG officers at UCL and KCL Students' Unions to talk about all things postgraduate and get ideas for best practice in PG engagement.

Postgraduate Access & Participation

Whilst in London with the PG sabbs, we talked about their ability to support those students who came from non-traditional university backgrounds. They had various methods on how to engage prospective PG students and make sure they stay on, which we will be exploring in the months to come. I also visited a partner of ours to talk about PG access and how we could make sure that we could recruit those who were wanting to do a PG course. This is one of the key questions that we will pose to the PGT advisory board over the coming months as well, about how they envisage better Postgraduate access looking to them.

(Hidden) Academic Costs

We're in the process of building a tool on our website where you will be able to report those costs relating to your course that you weren't expecting – whether it's more textbooks because there weren't enough in the library, or a trip that you weren't planning on funding which turned out to be a little bit more compulsory than you thought – let us know! When the link becomes available I will let you know.

General updates:

Strikes

As you may be aware, UCU have voted to take strike action for 8 days this term, and to continue this in the form of Action Short of a Strike after the strike ends. The SU have been working with UCU to get the most important information out to students so they are aware of

the reasons lecturers have voted to strike and how this will affect their education. You might also have heard Kate and I speaking to BBC Radio Newcastle about the strikes, and our position of support for the striking lecturers.

Personally, showing support for the strike is important as some of our student body are represented by UCU in their capacity as teaching staff. PGRs who teach have not had any kind of pay rise, whether in real terms or in nominal value, for the last 10 years, and have every right to protest about this treatment. We hope other students will understand this, and trust us when we say that despite our support for strike, we are also doing what we can to limit the impact this has on your education. We are doing our best to ensure that independent study services remain open during the strike – for instance, we have assurances that the Billy B will remain open during the strikes, and the SU building will remain open as study space too.

PG study space

It's great to hear that so many PG students are using the PG study room in the library, even if this means it is sometimes over capacity! We know PG-only study space continues to be an issue across the University, but good news - the University will be creating two new floors of PG-specific work space on the Science site from next year as part of the University-wide estates developments! Look out for further updates as the year goes on...

PGT fees

Students are rightly outraged at the hike in PG fees silently announced by the University for next year, for both international and home students. PGT fees now outrank UG fees in almost every discipline, in sharp contrast to fees for the rest of the past decade. These fees are set by the University without any external regulation, so this decision to raise them is their choice – and further than that, students have been frozen out of the fee setting process. This is unacceptable, and I will be taking this further as I collate more information.

PG Mental Health

I've been working with our Welfare & Liberation Officer Lia to support her planning of the PG Welfare priority, and commenting on both the upcoming Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Student Support Review from a PG point of view at Uni committees. There are also some PGR mental health online support tools the University has developed that I will be asking a select number of PGRs to help test. If you're interested in this, please drop me a message.

Best of the Rest:

- We've been taking part in Education strategy reform here at the SU.
- I have been helping with the interview process to appoint another member to Council, one of the highest operations committees that govern the University.
- The Lecture Capture policy has been finalised at Senate; our intervention should mean there'll be stronger rules about the need to inform students when staff opt-out in future.
- We're planning an event for Winter Graduation, an area the University traditionally has done very little for – we'll in particular hope to give graduating PGTs a good send off!
- We're trying to try to understand more about how South College's PG community will look like when it's set up next year, working with MCR PresComm to do so.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Jess Dunning, Opportunities Officer

RE: Opportunities Officer Report

DATE: 3rd December 2019

Update on priorities:

1. Improving Sustainability within the university

- a. I have a meeting this week to finalise plans for the campaign next term.
- b. We are also looking at putting in a bid to the National Lottery for some money to do sustainability things
- c. I attended the SOS environment and Sustainability conference at the beginning of November
- d. I am planning trips to SU's in the country who have been campaigning and doing things around sustainability well.

2. Lobbying the university to become an accredited Real Living Wage Employer

- a. I ran a real living wage campaign week
- b. We got around 1000 interactions each day
- c. I attended Newcastle university's accreditation evening
- d. I held workshops last week which had some good attendance and we were productive in coming up with a 'next actions plan'.
- e. Moving forward, I am starting to write a report to UEC and finalising another campaign week next term, linking it in with the first UN Sustainability Goal – Poverty.

3. Funding Gap for students

- a. Not started working on this yet, but will be after Christmas.

General updates:

- I attended the Climate Strike two Fridays ago and was so impressed by it and what the societies and students did. I thought it was vital.
- I have been organising the Presidents Forum and Social for our student groups which is happening on the 26th of November.
- I attended Senate and spoke up about lecture capture and how it helps people with extenuating circumstances and gave me own experience as a good example of how it helps. The fire alarm did go off during my speech but it did get the attention I wanted.
- I attended a Green Space meeting and found it very inspiring how much students are doing within their colleges to be green and sustainable. I am looking forward to working with them more in the future.
- I went to London during the last assembly for the National Student Radio Awards and Purple Radio won Gold and Silver which was an AMAZING achievement!
- I have been invited to speak at Durham Soup on the 5th of December about the Living Wage Campaign which is very exciting and a big honour.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Welfare & Liberation Officer

RE: Welfare & Liberation Officer Update

DATE: 3rd December 2019

Priorities:

1. AN INCLUSIVE DURHAM: **Breaking down institutional barriers**

- **#BurstingTheBubble Campaign**

Launched the #BurstingTheBubble campaign with two bubble stands which collected student feedback and began to create space for an inclusive environment. This was also replicated at Josephine Butler College. The next stage of this campaign will be the production of guidelines and the roll out to other colleges and student groups.

- **Respect Commission**

This is a confidential commission which was created in the wake of Durham SU President, Megan Croll's experience of sexism within the university. I have contributed to the commission's work by conducting interviews and relaying student and student leader's experiences. The report is scheduled to be finalised and released in the New Year at which time there will be recommendations for an improved respectful culture at the university.

- **New SV Caseworker**

I was invited to sit on the informal interview panel for the new sexual violence case worker, giving a voice to students within the process. A new case worker was appointed and is currently working within the student conduct office to improve the university's response to sexual violence.

- **Tenants Rights & Tenants Act Factsheet**

At the end of last year there was an update to housing legislation, The Tenants Act 2019. To assist in knowing the student rights I have put together a Tenants Act factsheet which is available through the website. Also, we are working with the Pro-bono society's Tenants Rights group to expand our workshops and resources available to students.

- **Student Drop-Ins & Forums**

I have been running student drop-ins for two hours every two weeks. These have been an informal chance for students to ask questions and raise issues. There will be one final drop-in before the end of term and an Instagram poll will be ran to determine if students want further drop-ins next term.

I have also been running welfare forums, the first centring on sexual and general student health, which was attended by both college and association welfare

officers. The issues arising were cost and procedures around concessions, international access to healthcare services and worries about sexual health provision. The feedback has been collected and will inform future meetings with the University Health Centre and the student support strategy.

- **Period Poverty**

We are piloting a scheme with the Student Support and Wellbeing department to provide free sanitary products in the Bill Bryson library. This will be in collaboration with the Period Positive society and Bill Bryson library staff, with the donation stage now underway. Sanitary products will be available in the level 2 accessible toilets and in a gender neutral location on level 3 starting Epiphany term.

- **Level 2 Mental Health First Aid**

The level 2 modules for Mental Health First Aid (specifically for student leaders) is under production and in collaboration with the counselling service. This will cover signposting, maintaining your boundaries, and when it is appropriate to break confidentiality. Special thanks to Josephine Butler College who allowed us to film, and the student actors who took part. The finalised module will be launched in the New Year.

2. POSTGRADUATE WELFARE: **Identifying key issues and developing welfare and support through policy**

- **Policy for Students with Children**

Due to a number of emails received from students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, raising issues around university guidance and facilities available to students with children. I have highlighted this at the Student Support and Wellbeing Committee and a paper has been presented proposing a task and finish group to identify and address these issues. A further, more detailed paper is due to be produced with the unanimous support of the committee.

- **Supporting MCR's**

MCR elections have only just been finalised and I am collating a list of postgraduate contacts with the intention to hold a forum to discuss their key issues. There is also capacity for training to be made available in Epiphany term.

- **Postgraduate Mental Health**

Given the newly released DUO modules targeted towards postgraduate research students, myself and David will be continuing to identify gaps in provision and highlighting this to university management to improve services for the postgraduate community.

- **Departmental Peer Support Groups**

Following departmental enquiries, David and I will be encouraging departments to set up peer coffee mornings embedding peer support, especially for marginalised groups such as disabled students or students of colour.

- **Information for Postgraduates, including International Postgraduates.**

Postgraduates are subject to differing term times and often variations of procedure. Due to this myself and David are investigating the best structures to disseminate essential information to the postgraduate community, throughout the academic year and into Fresher's Week (20/21).

- **Tackling Financial Issues**

For some time postgraduate students have raised serious concerns around their treatment when going through financial issues and the impact this has on their mental health and wellbeing. Often the root cause is relatively small sums of money but that has a massive negative impact on students that are usually already subject to ill health, concessions and complex personal circumstances. Therefore we will be setting up a meeting with the university's Chief Financial Officer to discuss ways in which to address this.

3. LIBERATION: Initiate a framework and environment that supports marginalised groups of students to campaign for changes that will improve life and wider society for them.

- **Association governance & ratification**

Over the summer I have worked with our liberation consultant to address issues of association governance and empower students with a sense of confidence in our frameworks. In doing this I have worked alongside the opportunities officer and wider opportunities team to ensure that the Trans, Womens and Working Class Students associations are now ratified and have their vote on Assembly. I will continue to work to strengthen this framework and within our upcoming liberation project.

- **Response to Tackling Racial Harassment: Universities Challenged Report**

Following the report into racism on campus by The Equality and Human Rights Commission we have issued a response collectively as a Student Union which highlights our stance going forward and centres the voices of Durham People of Colour association and those student leaders who are pivotal to the institutional response and recommendations to address this national culture on our campus.

- **Report and Support**

I have led the collaboration with the university in the launch of the Report and Support tool which adds to our existing provision to report hate crime on campus and within the local community. This tool allows students to highlight incidents of harassment, sexual violence, bullying and hate crime, and giving the student instant signposting information to relevant support.

- **Sexual Health Video**

Following the student health forum I sat down with the VP of LGBT+A and filmed a video raising awareness of sexual health issues, the gum clinic and how students may access services there.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Sarah McAllister, MCR Presidents' Committee Chair

RE: Sub-committee Report

DATE: 03 December 2019

Update on priorities:

Increasing Participation in Postgraduate/MCR Events

At the first meeting of MCR PresComm, we identified that participation at events in college communities was a key priority for MCR Presidents. Across the common rooms, participation can vary year on year. Some common rooms have set up PG 'families' or something similar to put people in contact with each other and promote diversity and increase cross college socialisation. As part of this we want to re-engage targeted groups within MCRs, including international students, mature students, livers-out, students with families and part-time students, who often face more barriers when getting involved in postgraduate communities.

Ensuring that Postgraduate Communities are sustainable is essential for MCRs/Postgraduate Communities to thrive. In colleges this depends on there being PGR (Postgraduate Research) students there as most PGT (Postgraduate Taught) students are only in Durham for a year. We are currently looking into understanding how students are allocated to colleges and want to ensure the University understands that PGRs need to be dispersed equally across all the colleges.

Building on this, we are working to ensure we have a sufficient handover as a committee to ensure that we are not facing the same issues every year. As members change throughout the year, this is even more paramount.

Increasing the range of Inter-MCR Events

Traditionally the main Inter-MCR events have been the formals held across the colleges. Whilst, we want this tradition to continue, we want to expand the types of events that are open to people across colleges. This is for two reasons: firstly, to create a thriving postgraduate and mature student's community across Durham and secondly, to increase accessibility. As the Inter-MCR formals which are generally priced above £15, this is too expensive for some people, and therefore events such as a Pub Quiz or a Bar Night allow more people to engage with a wider postgraduate community without the same financial pressure.

JCR/MCR Relations

This is something that has come up regularly in our conversations, and therefore we want to make sure that we support the different systems that are currently in place that do work. As well as help to ensure that there is a productive and beneficial relationship between postgraduate communities and JCRs. Another priority is to ensure there is a fair financial distribution and autonomy between JCRs and MCRs/Postgraduate Communities.

Currently Collingwood College does not have an MCR President and have been unable to find anyone to fill this position. This has followed a few years of difficulty with how the JCR and MCR have interacted with one another. At the last MCR PresComm, we had a productive and positive discussion with the JCR President of Collingwood to set some short-term goals, to ensure that Postgraduate Students at Collingwood are not missing out. These ideas included small scale events that could be held in Collingwood (such as movie nights), asking the Collingwood Postgraduate what they want to be done with the two MCR rooms, and holding an Inter-MCR bar night at Collingwood with the support of other MCRs/equivalents. The Collingwood JCR President was also able to outline some more long-term plans to overcome the difficulties taking place, which we, as a committee, will continue to support.

With the opening of South College next year, we have been discussing the best way to set up an MCR for the college to ensure that the 2020/21 intake at South College are not disadvantaged. We came to the conclusion that it would be best that the MCR originally is included within the JCR so they have sufficient support in the beginning, but as soon/if they wanted to become independent then it would be decided by a vote of the MCR members only, rather the entire JCR. This has now been relayed to the Principal of South College.

General updates:

Winter Graduation

We have been in discussions with David Evans, SU PG Academic Rep, about provisions for Winter Graduation as it something that is often over looked in comparison to Summer Graduation and primarily effects Postgraduate Students. There is currently an idea that there could be a larger event held at the SU which could appeal to more students, rather than have smaller events across the colleges which could flop.

Costs for Postgraduate Study

Fees for Postgraduate Taught Degrees have risen significantly for 2020/2021. This is something that is being discussed at MCR Pres Comm which we are hoping to take further.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Tom Chapman
RE: Sub-committee Report
DATE: 03 December 2019

Update on priorities:

- Sexual Violence: Campaigning to update the university's sexual violence policy, to make it clearer how to make a complaint and make it easier to do so, such as through an anonymous complaints system. Additionally, working with college welfare teams to establish what support they need going forward to tackle this issue.
- SU Democracy: Broadening engagement among ordinary students in SU decision-making. Raising general awareness of where you can engage in the democratic process, such as demystifying how assembly works, how you can propose motions and amendments and how you can hold officers accountable.

General updates:

- College SU Rep Committee are meeting more frequently and broadening our scope for cross-college campaigning
- We seek to be as open and transparent as possible, so I will aim to fully update this assembly on our activities throughout the year, and answer any questions people may have either at assembly or throughout the year

TO: Assembly

FROM: Jessica Madden President Students with Disabilities Association and
David Evans Postgraduate Academic Officer and
Amelia McLoughlan Welfare and Liberation Officer

RE: Durham University is Institutionally Disablist

DATE: 3 December 2019

Assembly notes:

1. Durham City has stood for centuries, with many historic buildings and an steep terrain cut by the River Wear.
2. Many of these buildings are occupied by the University and are physically inaccessible.
3. The SU and the Students with Disabilities Association (SwDA) recently undertook a survey of every teaching space across campus to assess accessibility, after the University declined to do so from its own resource.
4. Durham University recently introduced Lecture Capture facilities in many of its teaching rooms; the English department and certain individual academics currently refuse to use this technology.
5. Durham University, unlike many other Universities, does not provide funding for disability diagnostic tests for its students.
6. Durham University recently introduced a Fitness to Study Policy, under which several students with long-term ill health have been forced to end their studies prematurely.
7. Durham University refuses to admit disabled students to certain Colleges where the cost of adapting accommodation for such students is deemed prohibitive by the University.
8. The number of students of Durham University declaring a disability has increased by 150% over the past 10 years, compared to the student body growing by 22%. [1]

[1] <https://www.dur.ac.uk/student.registry/statistics/summary/1.7disability/> (comparison between Academic Year 08/09 and 18/19 figures)

Assembly believes:

1. Durham University gives little, if any, thought into the impact of estate development on disabled students, for example:
 - Wheelchair accessible desks in the Teaching and Learning Centre were blocked by immovable seats despite being opened only this year
 - Plans for a new pedestrian route on South Road to avoid physically dangerous roadside conditions originally included stepped access only
2. Certain Durham University academics are permitted to act in a disablist manner without challenge or action being taken, for example:

- Staff members utilising Fitness to Study processes as a threat to demand compliance from disabled students or suppress complaint
 - Refusing to allow laptops in class, access to notes or Lecture Capture for disability support purposes unless a student declares personal details of their disability to that individual lecturer
3. Durham University defaults to attempting to avoid the cost or effort of dealing with issues raised by disabled students, for example:
 - Refusing to release funding for dropped kerbs around campus to be installed despite multiple requests being raised on safety grounds
 - Outsourcing note-taking support to an external company despite repeated issues raised by students as to the competence of the note-takers they provide
 4. Durham University places the onus on individual students to manage their support even where the University is responsible for providing it, for example:
 - Requiring students with long-term conditions to pay for medical evidence and repeatedly justify their need for deadline extensions and other forms of concession
 - Failing to implement a proper system for communicating disability support notices to staff, requiring students to request support from each staff member individually
 5. Durham University hides behind the guise of 'tradition' in perpetuating disablist behaviours, for example:
 - Students with hidden disabilities are prevented from leaving formal dinners when their condition requires it without either disclosing their disability or facing a financial penalty
 - The refusal to move inaccessible post-graduation events held in historic buildings to alternative, accessible locations
 6. The above points are only indicative of the wider approach Durham University has towards supporting disabled students, and collectively reflect a deep-seated culture within Durham University that seeks to marginalise disabled students, and tolerates the provision of a substandard academic and wider student experience to them.
 7. As the number of students declaring a disability at Durham University continues to increase, Durham University must change its attitude to the treatment of disabled students and vastly improve the support on offer to these students.

Assembly resolves:

1. To declare Durham University as being Institutionally Disablist.
2. To demand the University create an Action Plan, in conjunction with the SU and other relevant groups, for tackling the culture of disablism faced by students of Durham, through both reform to University processes and tackling individual disablist behaviours.
3. To require the SU Officer Team, with the Welfare and Liberation Officer as the project lead, to work with the University to tackle the culture of disablism in the University, whether through the Action Plan demanded above or otherwise.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Tom Chapman

RE: Fight the Housing Rush - No Housing Ads in Michaelmas Term

DATE: 3 December 2019

Assembly notes:

- Durham SU advertises private rented accommodation in its building throughout Michaelmas term
- The pressure to sign houses early is a significant source of stress for students
- The SU has pledged itself to support college efforts to encourage students to take time to sign
- The housing advertised is almost universally luxury accommodation, failing to reflect what ordinary students would expect or be able to pay
- The SU receives significant revenue from this advertising

Assembly believes:

- The Students' Union cannot consistently promote the view that students should take time to sign whilst also promoting private rented accommodation during the months where the pressure to sign is greatest
- Such advertising undermines the effort of other student campaigners to fight the housing rush
- Advertising luxury accommodation in particular, and not a range of well-vetted and reasonably-priced options, distorts students' expectations of private rented accommodation and promotes an incorrect picture of housing in Durham
- The revenue raised through this advertising, important as it is, could be replaced by simply providing the same advertising platform to less problematic businesses.

Assembly resolves:

- To end the advertising of private rented accommodation on SU property (both physical and digital) during the Michaelmas term of each academic year
- To diversify the advertising done for the remainder of the academic year to present a broadly representative range of price options, not privileging luxury accommodation