

# DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

There will be a meeting of Assembly at 1600 on Thursday 3 June 2021.

Please try to join the meeting from 1545, to allow for connectivity tests, for a prompt start at 1600.

## AGENDA

### 1. OPENING OF MEETING (CHAIR, 2 MINUTES)

To receive apologies, conflicts of interest, notification of any other urgent business not on the agenda, and a welcome from a member of the Durham SU staff team.

### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 11 MARCH 2021 (CHAIR, 2 MINUTES) UA/2021/31

To accept the minutes as an accurate record of the previous meeting.

*Routine business items*

### 3. ELECTIONS RETURNING OFFICER REPORT (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2021/32

To receive the Returning Officer report on the outcome of Durham SU 2021 Elections.

### 4. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIPS (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2021/33 TO FOLLOW

To approve Honorary Life Members recommended by Governance and Grants Committee.

### 5. UPDATE QUESTIONS\* (OFFICERS, COMMITTEE/ ASSOCIATIONS CHAIRS, 10 MINUTES)

To answer questions on Officer, Committee and Association updates.

*Items for discussion:*

### 6. THE VOTING RECORDS OF INDIVIDUAL ASSEMBLY MEMBERS SHOULD BE PUBLICLY KNOWN AND READILY ACCESSIBLE (JON CHAN, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 34

To discuss a motion on voting records of individual Assembly members being publicly known and accessible.

### 7. JOIN THE LIFT THE BAN COALITION (ELLA TURNEY, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 35

To discuss a motion on Join the 'Lift the Ban' Coalition.

### 8. STAND IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF PALESTINE (DPOCA, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 36

To discuss a motion to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine.

### 9. SUPPORTING STUDENT SEX WORKERS: SU CORE POSITION (WELFARE AND LIBERATION OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 37

To discuss a motion on a policy to support student sex workers.

*\*A comfort break of 10 minutes will be held, before returning to discussion items.*

**10. POSTGRADUATE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION (PG ACADEMIC OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/38**

To discuss a motion on Postgraduate access and participation.

**11. CLIMATE EMERGENCY (OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 39**

To discuss a motion on the Climate emergency.

**12. DEMOCRACY REVIEW PART 1: ASSEMBLY POLICY DEVELOPMENT (OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 40**

To discuss a motion on the Democracy Review (Assembly policy development).

**13. DEMOCRACY REVIEW PART 2: COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS (OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 41**

To discuss a motion on the Democracy Review (Committees and Working Groups).

**14. DEMOCRACY REVIEW PART 3: MEMBERSHIP AND PURPOSE (OPPORTUNITIES OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2021/ 42**

To discuss a motion on the Democracy Review (Membership and Purpose).

*\*Due to the number of motions to be discussed, Officer, Committee and Association updates will be available online from Tuesday 1 June and questions will be answered in the meeting.*

***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](mailto:dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk) at least 2 days in advance of the meeting to make arrangements.***

# DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING 11 March 2021

Virtual Meeting, Zoom

### 1. OPENING OF MEETING

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

### 2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON 4 FEBRUARY 2021

There were no amendments to minutes of the last meeting.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

### *Routine business items*

### 3. CHAIR/VICE CHAIR ELECTION

ST explained there had been no nomination for Chair of Assembly and encouraged members to nominate themselves for these positions.

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

### 4. GOVERNANCE AND GRANTS ELECTION

ST explained that there had been no new nominations for Governance and Grants Committee and encouraged members to nominate themselves or encourage others to nominate themselves for these positions.

### 5. ELECTION UPDATE

The Deputy Returning Officer gave an update on the recent elections, which had gone very well and results had been declared and secured. This had been the first year of using union cloud for voting, which worked very smoothly.

A formal report will be provided at the next Assembly meeting once signed and received from the Returning Officer.

### 6. OFFICER UPDATES

ST had been working on a re-election campaign which has been successful and the focus now is the Culture Commission and how this can become sustainable and planning ahead to ensure this is carried forward beyond ST's presidency. This means expanding research and talking to more students, getting more ideas and input. Recently have joined the Students Against Fees campaign which is a national movement with other SU presidents and also on the panel for Vice-Chancellors recruitment.

SMc had worked with NH to secure the Safety Net Policy with the University and currently looking at the 5% rule for PGT students as this can't be used in the same way as undergraduate students. Also working on PG mental health which was discussed at the last meeting of Students Support and Wellbeing Sub-Committee. Working on creating a PG access and participation policy, as the current one the University has only relates to undergraduates and doesn't cover postgraduates.

NH had been writing a plan for Durham's access and participation plan and have been emailing student groups and associations for input and thoughts and will also be emailing JCR's for their ideas next week. Decolonising Durham work is still ongoing and faculties are still doing workshops. Information on intern roles should be available early next week, still awaiting confirmation from HR about advertising the roles on the student careers page.

ES had been working on sending a letter to Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister to ask for financial support for students that were unable to get out of housing contracts, the VC has also sent a supporting letter and had also been part of the accommodation charging review and had a meeting with the Council about the potential accreditation scheme. Currently working on recruiting active bystander facilitators, applications close tomorrow but hoping to roll this out further.

AM had been looking at third term and how the SU will support students and groups to carry out activities safely and in line with government guidelines, working alongside with common rooms on this as well. Have now joined the University Sustainability Development Goals Working Group. Democracy review is ongoing and now looking to move beyond the research phase and look at carrying out some modelling sessions, on trialing different formats of Assembly.

## 7. COMMITTEE UPDATES

Updates were provided from:

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

(Apologies from DUCK)

## 8. ASSOCIATION UPDATES

Updates were provided from:

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

(Apologies from Working Class Students' Association)

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

## **9. REFERENDUM ON SU AFFILIATION WITH NUS**

RP spoke for the motion and stated that two years ago, the NUS was on the verge of bankruptcy. Even without the pandemic there's been a chronic lack of capability to managing finances and they are currently in the middle of paying the price. There are millions of pounds of yearly deficits, they've sold their London HQ and they've made staff redundant and as an SU we are essentially propping this up. Being affiliation to NUS contradicts the work being done with the culture commission and the democracy review. The vast majority of students on campus don't know what the NUS is or does and it has been completely irrelevant in the last decade.

AM proposed procedural motion 8, to vote on the motion in specific parts and assembly members agree to have the discussion.

AM spoke for the proposed procedural motion and said that although it's understandable this debate is wanted but it would be beneficial to split the motion to first vote on the believes, so the principals that we want to have this discussion and look at our relationship with NUS and then vote on the resolves separately and decide if we want to have the referendum next term and whether we want to allocate the resources right now to the amount of work this would create.

There was no speech against the procedural motion.

ST moves to a vote.

**The procedural motion passes and Assembly will vote on the motion in specific parts.**

**The believes of the motion passes.**

YR spoke against the motion and stated that now would not be the time to have a referendum as this would take priority over all other work that the SU is currently working on i.e. culture commission and democracy review, which are much more urgent pieces of work that a referendum on NUS affiliation and being a part of a global union of students is a positive thing and the SU would risk becoming more isolated by disaffiliating.

AL asked for clarification if other work would have to be pushed aside to enable the referendum to take place.

GH clarified that this would be the case and a referendum being called would take priority over all other work as the law requires this to be the case.

BB stated that for liberation groups the NUS is very important. The resources that the NUS allow access to crucial. This very week the University of Leeds has attempted to scale back its transgender equality policy and only through networking and pressure from trans students has this been averted.

ST moves to a vote.

**The resolve of the motion did not pass.**

## **10. THE FUTURE OF DU BILATERAL AGREEMENTS UPON THE DISCONTINUATION OF UK PARTICIPATION IN THE ERASMUS SCHEME**

RP spoke for the motion and stated that the next academic year is the final year of UK Erasmus participation and the government announced a new scheme called maturing scheme, which is intended to be a replacement on a global scale, but it is still unknown what the scheme will entail and if this will replicate what is included in the Erasmus Scheme and DU's bilateral agreements which stem from this and it could take a few years to fully understand the changes, therefore the development of a strategy is required to navigate through this time.

ST move to a vote.

**The motion passes.**

## **11. POLICY ON ANTISEMITISM AT DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

MM spoke for the motion and said that there is currently no definition for anti-Semitism for the SU and the policy that is being presented today was previously adopted in June 2018 but has now expired, so the policy is being brought again with an added note to invite the SU Board of Trustees to adopt this policy as an organisational policy so that it can be a permanent policy within the SU.

ST moves to a vote.

**The motion passes.**

# Returning Officer Report

## Durham Students' Union

Returning Officer	Peter Robertson (NUS Charity Director)
Deputy Returning Officer	Gary Hughes (Chief Executive Officer)

### Election Details

Dates of Nominations:	11/01/21 – 29/01/21
Number of Candidates:	10
Dates of Voting:	22/02/21 – 25/02/21
Number of Votes:	17433
Number of Voters:	3207
Number of Complaints/Appeals:	9 / 0
Number of Complaints/Appeals Upheld:	3 / 0

### Returning Officer Comments/Recommendations

Please ensure you complete the Election Support Service Request form at least 2 weeks prior to the commencement of your election. This is to ensure we have your dates on our system in advance, and so the elections support team can confirm that your request has been registered, and that RO support will be in place prior to the commencement of your elections.

### Confirmation of Fair Election

I hereby declare that this election was run in a fair and democratic manner which satisfies the stipulations as laid out within the 1994 Education Act.

### Returning Officer Signature and Date

Date:  14/04/21	Signature:  <b>Peter Robertson</b> <i>NUS Charity Director &amp; National Returning Officer</i>
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TO: Assembly

FROM: Jon Chan

RE: The voting records of individual assembly members should be publicly known and readily accessible

DATE: 3 June 2021

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**Assembly notes:**

Not only is the membership of the assembly unknown to a significant proportion of the student community, individuals have no means to access the voting records of their representatives

**Assembly believes:**

Accountability is a fundamental element of any democratic body, and individuals should have all the relevant information to facilitate them in holding their representatives to such. These information includes the arguments made by the representatives in the assembly, and shall extend to how their voting powers are exercised. The assembly believes that by disclosing how individual members voted, the student body can better scrutinise their representatives.

**Assembly resolves:**

To support the principle that voting records of individual members shall be publicised.

That the officers investigate into the possibility of including individual voting records in assembly papers or other suitable locations. And the officers responsible shall report to the assembly on the progress of investigation at the beginning of each assembly meeting.



TO: Assembly

FROM: Ella Turney

RE: Join the Lift the Ban Coalition

DATE: 3 June 2021

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**Assembly notes:**

- (i) Since 2002, people seeking asylum have only able to apply for the right to work after they have been waiting for a decision on their asylum claim for over a year, and only if they can be employed into one of the narrow, highly-skilled professions included on the Government's Shortage Occupation List (Source: Refugee Action);
- (ii) people seeking asylum are left to live on £5.39 per day, struggling to support themselves and their families, and left vulnerable to destitution, isolation, and exploitation (Source: Asylum Matters);
- (iii) the potential foregone economic gain for the UK economy of allowing people to work is estimated to be £42.4million via increased taxable income and reduced payments of accommodation/subsistence support (Source: Refugee Action);
- (iv) 71% of people polled agreed with the statement: "when people come to the UK seeking asylum it is important they integrate, learn English and get to know people. It would help integration if asylum-seekers were allowed to work if their claim takes more than six months to process" (Source: Refugee Action);

**Assembly believes:**

- (i) People seeking asylum want to be able to work so that they can use their skills and make the most of their potential, integrate into their communities, and provide for themselves and their families (Source: Asylum Matters, Help Refugees);
- (ii) restrictions on the right to work can lead to extremely poor mental health outcomes, and a waste of potentially invaluable talents and skills both for the economy of Durham and the UK (Source: Asylum Matters);
- (iii) allowing people seeking asylum the right to work would therefore lead to positive outcomes for those seeking asylum in the United Kingdom and for the local and national economy (Source: Lift the Ban Coalition);

**Assembly resolves:**

- (i) Join the Lift the Ban Coalition and lobby the University to join the coalition, which is campaigning to restore the right to work for everyone waiting for more than 6 months for a decision on their asylum claim.
- (ii) Join other student unions across the country including Newcastle and lobby regional partners such as Durham City Council to support further amendment.

TO: Assembly

FROM: DPOCA

RE: Motion to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine

DATE: 3 June 2021

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**Assembly notes:**

- 1) Following the dispossession of Palestinian families from their homes in Sheik Jarrah, the government of Israel reacted with grossly disproportionate violence against Palestinian protesters
- 2) The aggressive actions of the Israeli government have left over 200 Palestinians, including 59 children, dead within the space of a week
- 3) The use of forced dispossession, grossly disproportionate violence and settler colonialism has been a tool of the government of Israel against the Palestinian people for several decades
- 4) The government of the United Kingdom has actively funded, supported and been complicit in these acts of terror and aggression by the Israeli government against Palestinian citizens

**Assembly believes:**

- 1) That the Palestinian people have a fundamental human right to be free from forced dispossession, acts of state aggression that constitute war crimes, brutality against protesters and acts which constitute war crimes
- 2) That the Israeli government has been acting as an oppressive and fatal force against a people who are disproportionately disenfranchised and disempowered (the Palestinian people)
- 3) That the Students Union has a duty to fight for the fundamental rights of the people of Palestine who continue to face oppression against the Israeli government, not only on behalf of our Palestinian student populations, but also to uphold freedom from acts of violence against civilians as a fundamental human right.

**Assembly resolves:**

- 1) To stand in Solidarity with the people of Palestine against the actions of the Israeli government and publish a statement of solidarity as a Students Union
- 2) To raise awareness and campaign for the people of Palestine as they face the ongoing brutality of a substantially more powerful state
- 3) To lobby the University to boycott and divest from any organisation that funds or supports the Israeli government as it commits acts of terror against the Palestinian people
- 4) To condemn the Government of the United Kingdom in its complicity in funding and supporting such acts of terror and grossly disproportionate violence

**TO:** Assembly

**FROM:** Ewan Swift

**RE:** Supporting Student Sex Workers: Core Position

**DATE:** 3 June 2021

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### **The belief and its justification**

Student sex workers<sup>1</sup> should not face any barriers to accessing support which is well informed and free from prejudice.

In March 2015, the Student Sex Work Project<sup>2</sup> highlighted that the rising cost of University and associated living expenses had contributed to an increase in the number of students engaging in sex work with 4.8% reporting that they had been involved in sex work in some capacity. Additionally, around 1 in 5 respondents stated that they had at some point considered working in the sex industry. Given that the Covid-19 pandemic has created financial hardships for many students, and that financial reasons are heavily cited in the top ten reasons for entering sex work, it is likely that these numbers have increased.

As with any other student, those who engage in sex work have a range of support needs that may be related to or independent of their sex work. Nonetheless, due to the stigma attached to sex work many students choose to keep the work they do private, with 50.7% of respondents citing secrecy as a negative impact of working in the sex industry. This may act as a significant barrier to students disclosing their engagement in sex work when relevant to their support needs, or in accessing support all together.

Additionally, the above survey highlighted that for University staff to provide appropriate support to students who disclose their engagement in sex work, 62.8% would need additional policy or guidance to respond appropriately. This is primarily due to a lack of understanding surrounding the legality of sex work in the UK, support needs of student sex workers, and support services available. Given this, there is a risk that any support which student sex workers do receive may come from staff that lack the required understanding to provide appropriate non-judgemental support.

Our ultimate belief is that students who engage in sex work should not face any barriers to accessing whatever form of support they require, and that any support they do receive should be well informed and free from prejudice.

### **Definition of a better future**

Students who engage in sex work will be able to access whatever form of support they require without the fear of stigma or prejudice. Where a student's needs are relevant to their sex work, they

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<sup>1</sup> Sex work can refer to escorting, erotic dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, webcamming, adult modelling, sugar arrangements, phone sex, and selling sex (on and off the street).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.thestudentsexworkproject.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TSSWP-Research-Summary-English.pdf>

will be able turn to the SU and University to seek information and guidance surrounding their rights and will be appropriately signposted to support services. More generally, staff will feel that they have a fuller understanding of the definition and legality of sex work, and the appropriate guidance in place to respond accordingly to disclosures of sex work from students.

## **The barriers**

Prejudices and stigmas inhibit people's ability to provide adequate support for students engaged in sex work. It also remains the case that certain activities surrounding sex work are criminalised, although not all, leading to confusion around the legality of sex work more generally. Given the fact that the criminalisation of sex work is itself a socio-political issue, people who have particularly strong views about sex work may also have internalised resistance to adopting policies that they deem inappropriate or at odds with their personal views. There may also be an institutional lack of willingness to publicly show support for student sex workers.

Given this, it is necessary to ensure that information is disseminated to increase staff understanding and awareness of sex work, and that guidance is provided which centres the support needs of individual students and equips staff to appropriate respond.

## **Belief about the change and responsibilities**

The position of Durham Students' Union is:

*That* the SU should develop a Student Sex Work Toolkit similar to that created at the University of Leicester<sup>3</sup> and lobby the University to also adopt it.

*That* the SU should design a Student Sex Work Policy similar to that used at the University of Leicester<sup>4</sup> and lobby the University to adopt it.

*That* the SU should provide information and support for student sex workers through its advice service<sup>5</sup>

*That* the SU should support organisations such as National Ugly Mugs, Support for Student Sex Workers and the North East Sex Work Forum

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<sup>3</sup> <https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/offices/edi/student-sex-work-toolkit-final-december-2020.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/offices/edi/student-sex-work-policy-final-december-2020.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Example (York University Students' Union): <https://yusu.org/advice-support/support-a-z/supporting-student-sex-workers#>

TO: Assembly

FROM: Sarah McAllister

RE: Postgraduate Access and Participation

DATE: 3 June 2021

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**Assembly Notes:**

- In 2019 the University unveiled their undergraduate "Access and Participation Plan" on how they were doing at recruiting students from various backgrounds who are underrepresented in higher education. This was mandated by the Office for Students (OfS), the Higher Education regulator, who monitor how institutions progress and ensure that they meet their targets.
- Durham University's current Access and Participation plans states 'The following analysis looks at each of the key under-represented groups through the three undergraduate student lifecycle phases of access, student success and progression, and then looks at intersections between the groups.'<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this does not take into account Postgraduate students.
- Durham is not alone by not including Postgraduate Students in their Access and Participation plan as this is not a regulatory requirement set by the OfS.
- The Postgraduate Academic Officer has written a 'Postgraduate Access and Participation Plan',<sup>2</sup> which it is hoped will form the basis for the future University work in this area.

**Assembly Believes:**

- Many of the issues already outlined in the University's current Access and Participation Plan exist for Postgraduates, and it is necessary to consider this separately as well as expand on the current plan for more Postgraduate specific matters.
- Further to this, many of the issues that exist at the Undergraduate level are heightened at the Postgraduate level as people have already faced barriers prior to this point. Likewise, this also continues with those who are able to pursue an academic career.
- Whilst increasing representation is a key goal of Access and Participation, equally, if not more important are the changes needed to ensure that the experience of students at Durham is a positive one. Often in Access and Participation, there is too much of a reliance on increasing diversity rather than improving the experience of students from underrepresented groups while they are at University.
- Durham University should create and adopt a Postgraduate Access and Participation Plan, building on the work done by the Postgraduate Academic Officer, with the interests of under-represented students at its core.

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<sup>1</sup> Durham University's Access and Participation Plan 2020/21 to 2024/25, p. 1

<[https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/about/access/UniversityOfDurham\\_APP\\_2020-21\\_V1\\_10007143.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/about/access/UniversityOfDurham_APP_2020-21_V1_10007143.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1

**Assembly Resolves:**

- To mandate the Postgraduate Academic Officer to lobby the University to create and adopt a Postgraduate Access and Participation Policy, and update Assembly appropriately on this work.

## Appendix 1: Postgraduate Access and Participation Plan

### 1. Background

1. Durham University's current Access and Participation Plan outlines some of the barriers that currently exist in accessing higher education, ways of achieving change and measures of success for underrepresented groups. However, due to the OfS requirement that this focuses on the Undergraduates, the Postgraduate experience is not included in the current plan. Many of the issues already outlined in the current Access and Participation Plan exist for Postgraduates, but it is also necessary to consider this separately and expand on the current plan.
2. A crucial factor in the difference between the experience of under-represented groups at the Postgraduate level in comparison to Undergraduates is that Postgraduate students themselves are in the minority. The student culture in Durham is undergraduate centric and thus a cohesive Postgraduate community does not currently exist. This is not to say that there isn't excellent work being done across the University for Postgraduates, but in comparison to the undergraduate experience there is a notable difference.
3. Further to this, many of the issues that exist at the Undergraduate level are heightened at the Postgraduate level as people have already faced barriers prior to this point. Likewise, this also continues with those who are able to pursue an academic career.
4. It is important to note that when analysing access and participation at the Postgraduate level, that the same data and indicators are not always appropriate. A notable example is the use of POLAR to highlight Low Participation Neighbourhoods and household income to indicate socio-economic status. Postgraduate students may have been out of higher education for a significant amount of time and are more likely than undergraduates to support themselves rather than rely on their parents' income, this is not always an accurate indicator for Postgraduates.<sup>3</sup> This is evidenced by the ratio of young to mature students at the postgraduate level.<sup>4</sup> Of course, it still can be useful, as it can indicate how background impacts students' access to Postgraduate education.
5. The following paper looks at the under-represented groups, as well as how they intersect, and highlights the problems to access and the experience of these students once they are at Durham. Whilst increasing representation is a key goal of the plan,

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<sup>3</sup> This of course is a generalisation. There are many undergraduates who support themselves and also Postgraduates who have come straight from their undergrad degree who are still supported by their parents.

<sup>4</sup> [1.5 - Mature.xlsx \(dur.ac.uk\)](#)

equally, if not more important is the changes needed to ensure that the experience of students here is a positive one. Often there is too much of a reliance when looking at Access and Participation at increasing diversity rather than improving the experience of students from underrepresented groups while they are at University. This is a particularly poignant for the Postgraduate level, as if undergraduates have had a good experience at Durham, they are more likely to want to stay to do a Postgraduate degree.<sup>5</sup>

6. This means that the measures of success used will not all be quantitative and a qualitative understanding of the experience of Postgraduate students from under-represented backgrounds will be crucial as Durham University commits to challenging its current culture.

## 2. Disabled Students

### Access

1. Across Durham University, there is a large problem with accessible spaces. This includes certain department buildings being completely inaccessible and thus preventing some students from being able to study that subject at Durham.
2. Where these spaces are deemed accessible, some are only accessible to a certain extent, e.g. someone in a standard wheelchair may be able to access the room, but not move further than the entrance, or the door is wide enough for a standard wheelchair but not for a powerchair. Some teaching spaces are not fitted with an induction loop, and some lack basic lecture capture technology, so lectures/seminars cannot be watched back at a later date.<sup>6</sup>
3. According to disability charity Scope, being disabled costs on average an extra £583 per month.<sup>7</sup> Whilst some disabled students will meet the criteria for disabled students' allowance, some will not, and will be left to pay for any additional needs out of pocket. Choosing a postgraduate degree is already a difficult financial decision for many; accounting for this extra expense can make PG study prohibitively expensive.
4. Finding accessible accommodation, as well as any support services, can be difficult and there can be a reticence to leave an already established care network as it can be difficult to re-establish this in a new place with a different NHS trust, who may advocate for different care strategies. Whilst this is not something the University is

<sup>5</sup> This will be addressed in more detail later in the document. There are a number of reasons why students may stay at Durham to a Postgraduate, one notable example is of course the alumni discount which is a significant financial help to students.

<sup>6</sup> All information is correct as of 2019; a thorough investigation as to whether these issues have been rectified by 2021 is imperative.

<sup>7</sup> [Disability Price Tag](#) | [Disability charity Scope UK](#)



able to have direct involvement over, it is pertinent to remember that a reason why some disabled PGs choose Durham may have very little to do with the University itself; leading to higher rates of dissatisfaction if Durham was not their first choice.

5. Some students with more complex medical needs cannot be seen by specialists in clinics in County Durham and are referred to specialist services in the surrounding area, often Newcastle. This adds on an extra burden of spending money on travel to and from clinics all over Newcastle, as well as finding accessible transport and losing time trying to navigate seeking medical care in a different county.
6. Some students who are undiagnosed, especially those who have a specific learning difficulty,<sup>8</sup> are prevented from getting support because the cost of diagnosis is prohibitive, and/or they do not present symptoms clearly enough or articulately enough to medical staff that allows them a differential diagnosis that can then be accepted by disability services as a recognised condition.<sup>9</sup>
7. Certain conditions are defined as disabilities within the UK<sup>10</sup> which may not be the case internationally, and culturally there may be differing understandings of what constitutes a disability.

#### Success

1. The University should support diagnosis cost for students who cannot afford it. This can be included through a fast-tracking mechanism to the hardship fund/or specific fund for testing. This budget would be set on a yearly basis and if it is not all used it can go back into the hardship fund.
2. LearnUltra will be increasing the accessibility of Durham's VLE. The roll out of Learn Ultra needs to be supported by staff and have universal buy-in from all staff to make the platform and files accessible.
3. During the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years many students appreciated the flexibility of the exams and the learning experience. While the University is recovering from the pandemic, there needs to be a commitment to continuing these flexible options for students. This means a commitment to installing adequate lecture capture facilities in all teaching spaces.
4. The inaccessibility of Durham's buildings cannot be fixed without a huge financial investment. As this is unlikely to happen, there needs to be recognition from the

<sup>8</sup> Commonly used to refer to conditions such as ADHD, ADD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia among others

<sup>9</sup> Report written by University of Liverpool on the cost of diagnosing specific learning difficulties by Educational Psychologists.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010#:~:text=You're%20disabled%20under%20the,to%20do%20normal%20daily%20activities.>

University that campus is inaccessible, and a working group established to see what can be done for the accessibility of campus.

5. The University needs to be more proactive in supporting students who may not have a confirmed diagnosis, but exhibit certain support needs, especially when this be because of differing cultural understandings.

### **3. Ethnicity**

#### **Access**

1. Durham University has been cited as an institution that has a reputation for racism and is unwelcoming to people of colour. This has been stated to be pervasive, coming from both students and faculty alike.<sup>11</sup> Due to the experiences of students of colour when they come to Durham at the undergraduate level many do not wish to stay on to a Postgraduate degree.
2. Durham University has very few staff of colour across academic, college and professional support staff, meaning that key anti-racist research is often not done at the University, because there is no established home for it in the University structure or the current workforce to create a research group to adequately tackle anti-racist work.
3. There is an overreliance on certain members of staff to do anti-racist work, which can lead to burnout and subsequently this work being left undone. This work is often done in addition to the person's other duties, and they are therefore not compensated adequately for the work they do. This means the work is often tokenised as a bonus and is not properly budgeted for to continue the work when a particular member of staff stops doing this work/leaves the institution.
4. There is a lack of resources in the University collections that describes PoC's experience, and what is there is often very colonial in narrative. This means that students wishing to look at decolonial narratives are often unable to or forced to ask for access from other institutions and/or buy their own resources. This has further consequences, in that prospective PG students often find other institutions where the resources are better suited to their research and there are adequate amounts of academic staff engaged in this work to be potential supervisors for research and study.
5. This is an issue that starts with undergraduates. The current aims of the University are to recruit more students of colour, without any thought to how to improve the

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<sup>11</sup> [Students play drinking games with the N word': Black students on racism at Durham \(thetab.com\)](https://thetab.com/articles/students-play-drinking-games-with-the-n-word-black-students-on-racism-at-durham)

support given and their experience so that they become active ambassadors of the Durham experience as alumni. This recruitment is often done in patronising ways, based on the false assumption that potential students of colour do not apply to Durham because their aspirations are not high enough.<sup>12</sup> This is in itself a racist response. Without breaking down these barriers for undergraduates the work for Postgraduate students will be superfluous due to the pipeline of students going through the higher education system.

#### Success

1. The current Access and Participation Plan focuses too much on quantitative data as a measure of how diverse the student population is. There needs to be a recognition that 'diversity' is not the answer to fixing the accessibility of Durham's community. Instead, there should be a shift of focus to changing and tackling Durham's culture so that students of colour are not only surviving, they are thriving whilst gaining a top-class degree from a leading institution.
2. The University should take the outcomes of the Durham SU Culture Commission report seriously and commit to making the recommended changes as quickly as possible.<sup>13</sup> They should further engage in work with students to make sure the actions they take in the future are appropriate and commit to anti-racist action, for the benefit of all students.
3. Decentring REC as the method of creating racial equality. REC in itself is based in the neoliberal concept of the modern University, which puts profit at the heart of the educational structure. In order to further decentre white supremacy from the institution, there needs to be active engagement in supporting students and staff to do this work.

#### 4. Part-Time

##### Access

1. The option to undertake Part-Time study at the Postgraduate level is not heavily advertised, to the point that it is often discouraged and seen as a last resort by some academics.
2. The financial commitment of a Part-Time degree, while the same as a Full-Time degree, is spread out over a longer amount of time and can place financial strain

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<sup>12</sup> AAC/20/74 p6 – raising aspirations is mentioned here in regards to widening participations students, and the phrase is found in most papers for Access & Admissions Committee

<sup>13</sup> The full culture commission report will be available in October 2021. Interim report: [Microsoft Word - CC InterimReport.docx \(nusdigital.s3.amazonaws.com\)](#)

on students. This is amplified when students are also supporting families and are having to pay for living expenses on a tight budget.

3. For Postgraduate Taught students, there are not a lot of students who undertake their degrees part-time and for those that do, many face difficulties finding a community as the rest or most of their cohort will change after their first year.
4. For Postgraduate Research students, the drop-out rates for students who are Part-Time is much higher than full-time students.<sup>14</sup> There is a danger that the high drop-out rates will lead to tougher admissions which may then detrimentally impact the ability of underrepresented groups to undertake PGR study.

### Success

1. Durham University should reassess the level of support that is currently available and set up dedicated support services specifically for Part-Time students. This can be set up in a similar fashion to the support groups that have been set up for PhD students. This is particularly important not only for peer support and the creation of a community but understanding the reasons for why people opt to complete their degrees part-time. As well as the financial reasons, previously mentioned, there are often other responsibilities such as caring or working which may mean they do not have the extra-time to focus. Understanding these issues in more depth will allow us to develop policies which can help Part-Time students, for example more leniency with deadline extensions and additional or tailored support.
2. The University should facilitate networking between Part-Time students from different courses to create a community and peer support for Postgraduate Taught Students here for more than a year.
3. There should be greater advertisement of Part-Time study as a valid option for students, especially as the cost of Postgraduate education means that for many, working alongside the degree is the only viable option. In addition to this, the University should develop guidance and signpost support for Part-Time students on managing the financial commitment.
4. Durham needs to provide support for students to ensure that students are adequately supported to manage studying part time alongside peers who are full time.
5. We, as a community, need to tackle the stigmatisation of dropping out. Dropping out of a course is not necessarily a bad thing; it is an acknowledgement that the course or the timing isn't right for the person. Shaming them for recognising and prioritising their own needs is counterproductive and decreases faith in the

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<sup>14</sup> RDSC/20/02 pp12-14

institution if they are looking to reapply/restart and may give other students who hear about this a negative impression of the institution and may make them more likely to come forward as someone who is struggling for fear of being stigmatised. Challenging the stigma should include changing the way it is used as a metric for success. Instead, we need a more nuanced approach to understand the factors involved in non-continuation and whether additional support could help someone complete.

## 5. Local Students

### Access

1. The make-up of Durham students does not reflect the community that the University is situated within. Durham, as an institution, also has a reputation in the local area of not reflecting the socioeconomics of the region and not being a place where students from the North East go to University.
2. Anecdotally, it is understood that Durham has less students who come from the local area than other regional Universities.
3. In the 2020/21 academic year, attitudes from some students towards students from the region and the region more generally has attracted national press interest as students have highlighted their overwhelmingly negative experiences of being local students at Durham. It is evident that there needs to be a serious commitment to change.
4. The current Access and Participation Plan acknowledges 'the institutional context and commits to distinct regional and national interventions to improve access.'<sup>15</sup>

### Success

1. Durham needs to commit to extending its current work with local schools from both Durham and the wider North East, alongside creating outreach projects with both University members of staff and its students. This is vital to help combat the perception that the local community have of Durham University and the types of people who come here, which is often an off-putting factor.
2. To improve the access and participation of local postgraduate students at Durham University, this work first needs to begin with attracting more local undergraduate students to Durham. As has previously been mentioned the student culture at Durham is dominated by the undergraduates as they are in the majority, however this is not the main reason. There are many barriers for local students which prevent them coming to Durham when they enter higher education. Without breaking down these barriers

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<sup>15</sup> Durham University Access and Participation Plan, p. 12.

for undergraduates the work for Postgraduate students will be superfluous due to the pipeline of students going through the higher education system.

3. There also needs to be a commitment to educating current students on local history and the context of Durham which can become part of the induction programmes to the University. Durham is proud to be a University that attracts people from around the world, and we believe that in conjunction with our Global Strategy we should be championing the history of the North-East and the people who live here.
4. As a community, we should empower people to challenge others' behaviour; there have been far too many examples of people treated unfairly for a multitude of reasons. Often local students are mocked due to local regional accents. Through education and working with the local community we want to create a Durham community where we can continue to attract people from around the world while supporting the local area.

## **6. Mature Students**

### **Access**

1. For Mature student attending Durham, there is not a cohesive community for older students due to the undergraduate centric student lifestyle which often focuses on those who are aged 18-22.
2. The current access and participation plan acknowledges that this is also an issue at the undergraduate level as 'Durham's undergraduate curriculum and student experience is largely designed for young entrants, who have recently been in formal education. Durham has always had a small yet significant mature student population, but these students have been dispersed throughout Durham's collegiate system creating very small populations in otherwise predominantly "young" communities. Durham intends to give further consideration to how we can adapt a student experience that is designed overwhelmingly for young entrants to better suit mature students.'<sup>16</sup>
3. Many mature students are coming back to study after a long period of absence and may not be familiar with learning technologies that have progressed during their time away from education. This puts them at a disadvantage to the young students in their cohort, who are used to using such services as part of an educational package to help them with their studies.

### **Success**

1. As a University, more can be done to help create a community through providing networks for mature students.

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<sup>16</sup> Durham University Access and Participation Plan, p. 10.

2. There also needs to be a recognition that some students are here to just get a degree, for example for those who are on career-specific degrees, and therefore we need to not fall into the trap of forcing people into the “student” life if it is not for them.
3. Furthermore, the University should develop a programme which will help students transition from working life to studying if students want that support. In this case, it is imperative that everyone knows the support available to them if and when they need it.
4. Similarly, to Part-Time students, there are often higher drop-out rates for mature students who may have competing priorities, such as caring and families.
5. To help support students, there should be a bursary scheme for nursery places at the Durham University Day Nursery to help alleviate caring responsibility and the financial pressure that this can put students under. This will also incentivise those for whom childcare expenses would prohibit them starting University to gain the relevant qualifications and excel.
6. To create a specific collegiate setting for local and mature students to come together. There have been discussions of creating an additional Postgraduate College, this would be welcomed to help foster more of a Postgraduate community at Durham. However, in addition to being for Postgraduates, we believe it could be beneficial to have a college specifically for students aged 21 and over. This is something that already exists at other Collegiate Universities as Cambridge has three colleges exclusively for mature students (Hughes Hall, St Edmund’s College and Wolfson College)<sup>17</sup> and Oxford has Harris Manchester College.<sup>18</sup>

## 7. International

### Access

1. The first barrier international students face are the unregulated fees, which although being benchmarked with competitor institutions, are only affordable to a select number of socioeconomically advantaged students. This leads to a lack of diversity in the international student community, where the majority enjoy a lifestyle that a certain amount who are attending Durham supported by scholarships or bursaries cannot partake in. This can impede community building with all international students, as community events and activities are often targeted towards those with the financial means to contribute to them.
2. Many international students arrive and successfully integrate themselves in life in Durham, however there are barriers to this, including an overreliance on UK and

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/why-cambridge/support/mature-students>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/colleges/college-listing/harris-manchester-college>



Durham specific vocabulary in induction, as well as students reporting that staff and UK domiciled students having negative or stereotypical attitudes towards them. The onus is then on the individual student to ask for clarification and challenge negative attitudes, which is an extra burden on top of an academically rigorous course in what may be a student's third or even fourth language.

3. There still exist significant gaps in the attainment for international students, and the continuation rates for PG international students are below those of home domiciled students.
4. The agreed IELTS scores can sometimes vary to admit a student lower than the agreed IELTS threshold; although this is now uncommon through tightening of IELTS scrutiny through the admissions process, a thorough check of this in all PG courses prevents any student being invited and unable to complete due to insufficient English.
5. Due to delays in PGT admissions, Durham is not seen as competitive, and some students choose to accept offers at other competitor universities in order to have enough time to apply for the correct study visa and book an acceptably priced flight to start their course.

#### Success

1. The induction period needs to be better structured to provide actual help and orientation to PG students, and accessible to people who don't know UK-specific terminology.
2. A smoother applicant journey for PGT admissions so that students feel in control of their application and that they receive timely updates about the status of their application.
3. To provide impetus to students and staff respecting others' cultures and experiences prior to their life and Durham, and to work together to foster an inclusive community open to others' experiences.

### **8. Gender**

#### Access

1. Whilst there is a generally positive gender balance at PG level, this is skewed towards women statistically taking more PGT courses and men taking more PGR courses, as well as an obvious gender imbalance in the subjects studied.
2. It is unclear how students report a gender outside of the binary, and the fact that this is labelled as "other" could be perceived as derogatory.



3. Certain aspects of Durham's culture have been called out as sexist and transphobic.<sup>19</sup> Although there has been a marked improvement in the handling of sexual violence cases, especially with the report & support tool, there have so far been no real attempts to rectify the more cultural aspects of sexism and transphobia by the University.

#### Success

1. Create more interest for women in traditionally underrepresented disciplines, starting with challenging stereotypes around research in certain disciplines.
2. To work with the Students' Union to uphold the findings of the Culture Commission and to work to end sexism and transphobia in University spaces.

### 9. Intersections of disadvantage

It needs to be acknowledged that some will fall into two or more of the identities listed here. This means tackling these issues comprehensively and proactively is imperative if the University wants to recruit these students.

## 10. Funding

### PGR Funding

1. Postgraduate research funding has been severely affected by both the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union. The financial aftereffects of these events look likely to continue for the next few years, as the Government works to bring the country out of an unpredicted and unprecedentedly large recession. This lack of funding for projects that may be categorised as more experimental, or do not directly serve niches that funders are looking for is likely to directly impact all of the groups listed above. This means there will need to be a concerted effort from the University to uphold innovation from students and work to make study attractive to those who will excel and help them find funding, rather than falling back on a traditional applicant to prop up a funding gap in a University department.
2. Although financial implications are not the most often cited reason for withdrawal from a PGR programme, the category "other personal" hides a multitude of competing issues, which finance can reasonably be expected to fall into.<sup>20</sup> For self-funded students, the pressure of funding themselves through a PGR degree whilst also earning enough to meet living costs can become increasingly difficult and lead to burnout, eventually leading to withdrawal.

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<sup>19</sup> Culture commission p9

<sup>20</sup> RDSC/20/02 pp5

### PGT Funding

3. There is likely to be a dramatic drop in the number of PGT students due to a shrinking economy and funding shortfalls. The current PGT loan from the Student Loan Company does not cover tuition fees for most PGT courses at Durham, so studying is still seen as a massive financial investment for students. This could be helped by incentivising recent Durham graduates with a blanket 25% tuition fee discount, as was arranged last academic year.<sup>21</sup>
4. Durham University also offers the 'Postgraduate Student Support Scholarships' which offer 100 Postgraduate Taught students a scholarship of £3000 if they were in receipt of the full maintenance loan.<sup>22</sup> This is often a crucial factor in students being able to continue to the Postgraduate level at Durham. If more funding can be made available for this scholarship, or others targeted at under-represented groups, it would make a huge difference in students being able to access a Postgraduate Taught degree.
5. Furthermore, the information about this scholarship, and the others that are available at Durham,<sup>23</sup> are not often communicated clearly to students. In comparison to at the undergraduate level, funding options are more complicated and confusing. The University can therefore do more to provide guidance on how funding works at the Postgraduate level as well as what opportunities they provide.

## 11. Communicating to Undergraduates about opportunities to undertake Postgraduate courses

1. Many students who are from under-represented groups, for a variety reasons, feel like undertaking a Postgraduate degree is not something for them.
2. In the 2020/2021 academic year, the Postgraduate Academic officer ran a 'To PG or not To PG' aimed at current undergraduates. The aim of the campaign was not to convince students to go into Postgraduate education, but to inform students so they could make an educated decision. To do this, we used the experience of current Postgrads and drop-in sessions so students could ask any questions they had.
3. Similarly, to information about funding options, Durham University can do more to communicate to students about what options they have when undertaking a Postgraduate degree (ie. Part-Time study) which can expand on the work of the 'To PG or not To PG' campaign.

<sup>21</sup> [Study : Alumni Fee Scholarship 2021-22 - Durham University](#)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.dur.ac.uk/study/pg/finance/funding/bursaries/scholarships/psss/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.dur.ac.uk/study/pg/finance/funding/bursaries/scholarships/>

## 12. Students who did not complete their undergraduate degree at Durham University

1. Durham University attracts students who have previously studied at different universities from across the country and the world, as well as those who chose to stay at Durham after their undergraduate degree.
2. Some students who have come from other Universities have reported feeling isolated and losing confidence because there has been an assumed level of knowledge, especially if they are studying a different subject than they did at undergraduate level.
3. This is something that needs to be taken into account when designing modules to ensure that students are not disadvantaged due to the University that they completed their previous degree at.

## 13. Bolstering PG communities

1. As already identified within this paper, there is not a cohesive Postgraduate Community at Durham as the student community is dominated by undergraduates.
2. There is, however, existing Postgraduate communities that exist across within the University.
3. Notably, there are Postgraduate Common Rooms (or MCRs)<sup>24</sup> which exist within the colleges. The MCRs do a lot for Postgraduates in Durham however unlike the majority of JCRs are run by volunteers rather than Sabbatical Presidents. They also have a quicker turnaround of students, as full-time PGTs are only in Durham for one year, which means it is hard to establish a consistent community. More can be done to help bolster MCRs:
  1. During induction talks representatives from the MCRs should be invited to talk about what the MCRs are, what opportunities they provide students with and how students can get involved. This is something that is often overlooked, however, as there will be a lot of new Postgraduates who will not have previously attended a collegiate University this is important to highlight during induction.
  2. There can also be more done to highlight the work of MCRs across the University, so they are not always an afterthought. This work has already

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<sup>24</sup> There are different names for the Postgraduate Common Rooms. The majority are referred to as Middle Common Rooms, however there is also the GCR (Graduate Common Room) at Ustinov, the Postgraduate President who leads the Postgraduate Community at Hild Bede's Student Representative Council and the Postgraduate and Mature Student's Committee Chair at Cuth's JCR. Some of the Postgraduate Common Rooms are separate entities to their respective JCRs whereas others form committees or societies within the JCR. This is mainly technical differences but useful to note when talking about MCRs.

begun in the Student Representation Working Group but will need buy-in from across the University to make sure that this is able to improve.

4. There are also several communities of Postgraduates that exist across the University which are more aligned with academic departments. However, there is no list of all these opportunities that exist so often rely on students stumbling upon them, especially if they cover an interdisciplinary subject but are not advertised in multiple departments. Collating this information will help these groups to grow and foster a Postgraduate Community.

## 14. Housing

1. In comparison to new undergraduate students, most new Postgraduates do not live in their college. This has two major impacts upon the Postgraduate experience: community and stress when trying to find a place to live.
2. Postgraduate Communities within the colleges often rely at those who live in to provide a central community of students. However, in the academic year 2020/21 the number of Postgraduate Rooms available was reduced due to the impact of the 'a-level fiasco'. This has a severe impact on the ability to have a cohesive community.
  1. Therefore, there should be a designated number of rooms in each college which are available for Postgraduates which cannot be reduced to get more undergraduates in college.
3. Furthermore, college accommodation is not guaranteed for Postgraduates. This can cause a lot of stress and anxiety for new students who miss out on college accommodation and therefore must search for accommodation in a city they may be unfamiliar with.
  1. The University should provide more guidance on the housing options and help to facilitate people finding housemates. The Students' Union has a 'Postgraduate Housing Guide',<sup>25</sup> however, more should be done by the University to signpost students to this resource and offer guidance.

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<sup>25</sup> [Postgraduate Housing Guide.pdf \(nusdigital.s3.amazonaws.com\)](https://nusdigital.s3.amazonaws.com/Postgraduate_Housing_Guide.pdf)

TO: Assembly

FROM: Opportunities Officer

RE: Climate emergency

DATE: 3 June 2021

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### **Assembly Notes:**

Following ECO DU's motion to Assembly<sup>1</sup>, Durham SU declared a climate emergency in November 2019, but Durham University is still to declare a climate emergency. Durham SU also passed a motion to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>2</sup>. The Opportunities Officer has discussed sustainability policy in many University spaces.<sup>3</sup> After speaking to the Vice Chancellor, a series of discussions with UEC were organised which both the Opportunities Officer and the President were invited to, indicating UEC support for acting on the climate crisis, although no firm decisions or outcomes have been made.

At each of the UEC discussions, University staff members directly referred to the campus climate strikes which occurred in 2019/2020 as a reason for the University to act.

With sustainability as a priority, there are multiple projects which the Opportunities Officer has been consulted on.<sup>4</sup> COP 26, the global climate change conference, is coming up this year and being hosted in Glasgow – many other students unions are running warm up educational events focussed on this.

### **Assembly Believes:**

The University community needs to start prioritising the climate emergency. Student campaigning should be continued and broadened to encompass more student voices. The University should continue to have a clear SU contact to liaise with on the issue of environmental sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Durham SU needs to take an intersectional approach to climate justice ensuring a joined-up inclusive approach towards sustainable development; making sure to include diverse voices

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<sup>1</sup> UA/1920/09 [Declaration of climate emergency.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Signing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Accord](#)

<sup>3</sup> the Vice Chancellor, the University Executive Committee (UEC), Greenspace, ECO DU and Durham County Council.

<sup>4</sup> The Green Move Out, the upcoming Greenspace Eco Festival, the Citizens Tyne and Wear Climate Action group, a termly sustainability forum co-hosted with the University; as well as establishing a Durham SU eco hazard reporting tool and running various social media campaigns throughout the year for Earth Day, Hedgehog awareness and SDG.

when creating decisions, to ensure no disadvantaged party is further oppressed. Durham SU needs to review its own operations in line with this.

The University needs to continue to feel the urgency of climate action and work to limit carbon emissions wherever possible in order to achieve carbon neutrality as soon as possible. The Students' Union should strengthen its commitment to working with ECO DU to share resources and organise campaigning for the University to prioritise the climate crisis.

### **Assembly Resolves:**

- That Durham SU risk assessments should include a question on environmental/social impact, with the intention of causing consideration of the wider impact of certain behaviour
- That Durham SU should advertise and support student-organised climate change demonstrations, advocating an intersectional approach to climate justice by acknowledging the disproportionate impact on the Global South.
- To create a task and finish group within Durham SU with the aim to create a list of actions to implement sustainable practices within the SU and coordinate campaigning for the University prioritising sustainability:
  - The task and finish group membership should include an SU Officer
  - ECO DU should be invited to be represented on this group
  - The task and finish group should be supported by the SU to undertake actions
  - The initial membership should be created based upon individuals emailing the Chair of Assembly to express interest. At the first meeting, a chair should be elected and the group may then create its own terms of reference.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Opportunities Officer

RE: Democracy Review Part 1 - Assembly Policy Development

DATE: 3 June 2021

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### **Assembly Notes:**

Durham Students' Union has conducted a review of its democratic processes during the 2021/21 academic year. The work identified a range of areas in need of review, with the most pressing being the Union's Assembly.

In November 2020 Durham SU launched the Democracy Review Survey, which ran until January 2021, collecting over 1000 responses from the student body. In-depth focus groups were carried out with groups of students including key student representatives. The results were collated by development consultants Miragold, and the Democracy Review findings were published to the student body in January 2021.

Key findings from the report were:

- low trust in Durham SU's democratic processes
- communication was a barrier for people finding out about or participating in democracy
- the democratic structures themselves were clunky and difficult to navigate

During February and March 2021 students were asked to consolidate the Democracy Review findings and provide suggestions for the changes they would like to happen. The Opportunities Officer carried out listening exercises with Common Room executives for specific feedback from that constituency, Assembly voting members were contacted to provide their feedback and democracy 'drop-ins' were organised for the wider student body. During April and May, students were invited to workshops to trial new models for Assembly. The focus of the workshops was on motion discussion, membership and meeting structure.

From the various student engagement activities, taking on board student feedback and best practice from other students' unions, a remodeled Assembly has been designed.

Not all the changes that are proposed during student consultation require Standing Order reviews and are actions to be carried out by the organisation that address comments in the initial research. These include, for example, making financial information easier to access online. Many of these changes are straight forward, and a process of implementation will begin over summer.

### **Assembly Believes:**

Many of Durham SU's democratic processes are complex and interdependent with one another, existing in a landscape of multiple democratic systems through the variable Collegiate model and other university structures. Any reform process starts a ripple effect which may continue for some time.

Democratic change in any organisation, and in particular a students' union, should be seen as cyclical and continuous evolution, not once-in-a-lifetime revolution. To effectively develop and embed democratic changes, we must commit to an evolutionary and experimental approach to change, because this won't be perfect in the first cycle. It is clear that in summer 2022, a thorough review of the new model for Assembly will be required, and recommendations for refinement will be necessary.

The purpose of Assembly is to inform the policy direction of Durham Students' Union work between the annual election cycle and hold the elected officers to account on their work and the implementation of the union's policy positions. For the unions' policy work to be effective, we should take a more collaborative and deliberative approach to policy design and debate, along with scrutiny measures addressing its implementation.

The below points are reflective of the Standing Order changes to be made, including some descriptive next. They are not the proposed Standing Order text. By voting on Assembly Resolves DSU will commission new Standing Orders to be written that are reflective of the proposals. The new Standing Orders will be brought before this current Assembly Group for ratification over summer 2021.

## **Assembly Resolves:**

To make effective changes to Assembly's policy development process, the union proposed the following changes, which will require changes to Standing Orders B (Policy), D (Assembly), E (Committees and Forums).

### **1. Assembly Agenda**

#### **1.1 Standing Items on the agenda for Assembly are:**

- Minutes from previous meeting
- Apologies and conflicts of interest
- Reports from relevant committees
- Policy Discussion (part a. responsive policy, part b. reactive policy)
- Task and Finish Group Updates
- Any other emergent business



1.2 The only bodies accountable to Assembly are the SU's sabbatical officer team via the Officer Scrutiny Committee and the other sub committees. Associations and other groups are not accountable therefore shouldn't be required to report into Assembly. However, the SU should find a suitable platform to share updates from the various groups to the wider student body.

1.3 If an Assembly member does not attend the first three meetings without suitable apologies or a nominee, their vote and participation from Assembly will be removed for the remainder of the academic year.

## 2. Policy Process

### 2.1

Step	Action	Timeframe	
Pre Assembly – Policy Submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy is submitted to union.</li> <li>Policy reviewed by SU Board to ensure that in their view it meets legal, equalities duties etc. There should be a board Assembly committee which looks together at how the board's responsibility as laid to Assembly should interact. The board has the power to put chair of Assembly and others on that committee and that is what Assembly would like to happen.</li> <li>Chair and relevant committees notified of policies</li> </ul>	Policy initially submitted, checked by relevant groups and sent out to Assembly members in the third working week prior to Assembly.	- At least 15 working days before Assembly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policies sent to assembly members</li> </ul>	Friendly amendments	- 10 working days before Assembly

	<p>for friendly amendments*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motion submitter reviews and adopts friendly amendments</li> <li>• Adopted friendly amendment proposers get added to the motion signatories</li> <li>• Motions published to wider student body</li> </ul>	<p>submitted and drafted into original policies in the second working week prior to Assembly.</p> <p>Final draft of proposed policies shared with Assembly members and wider student body 5 days prior to Assembly.</p>	- 5 working days before Assembly
During Assembly – Policy Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposer speaks (optional) break into discussion groups**</li> <li>• Q&amp;A with proposer</li> <li>• Amendments</li> <li>• Speech against</li> <li>• Round of speeches (at chairs discretion)</li> <li>• Summation</li> <li>• Vote</li> </ul>	<p>Requesting discussion groups as part of the process could be set by either Assembly Procedures Committee ahead of the meeting or via a simple procedural motion.</p>	0 Assembly Day
After Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students informed of passed policy</li> <li>• Staff work with officers to work out how to plan policy implementation</li> <li>• Trustees informed where necessary</li> <li>• Officers scrutinised over policy implementation</li> </ul>	<p>Students informed of passed policy within 3 working days of Assembly.</p> <p>SU works to develop plan of implementation ahead of the next Officer Scrutiny Committee meeting.</p> <p>Updates on policy's progression at ongoing Officer Scrutiny Committee meetings if necessary.</p>	<p>+3 working days after Assembly</p> <p>No fixed time</p> <p>No fixed time</p>

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2.2 \*friendly amendments - Assembly members can send the motion proposer 'friendly amendments' to proposed policy within the timeframe described above. Friendly amendments are designed to add to the original motion in the spirit of the motion, rather than change the intention of the policy. The motion proposer can choose which friendly amendments they wish to adopt, however, if an amendment isn't adopted it can still be proposed at an Assembly meeting. If a friendly amendment is adopted into the policy ahead of Assembly, the proposer of the amendment is also added to the policy's 'owners', this however doesn't bind them to vote for the policy at Assembly.

2.3 \*\*discussion groups - Assembly members can request discussion groups after a policy has been presented during an Assembly meeting. The groups allow Assembly members to discuss the issues presented in the policy in more depth. Discussion groups can either be added to the agenda prior to Assembly by the Democratic Procedures Committee or requested via a simple procedural motion.

### 3. Policy Structure

#### 3.1

**Motion Title** - This should tell people what your motion is about. Be concise but clear.

**Assembly Notes** - This section is to provide context for your proposal. You should provide facts and figures (including references) detailing the reasons why this proposal is needed.

**Students lives will be improved because** – This section describes what implementing this policy will mean for students and provide a justification as to why Assembly members should vote for it.

**The change we want to see is** – This section outlines the change the motion proposers wish to see. It allows for an emphasis on vision rather than specific actions and helps Assembly members identify when a change has been achieved.

**Proposer** – This is the original proper of the motion. It could be a named individual student or a recognised group or committee e.g. Womxns Association.

**Supporters** – This includes any Assembly member or respective student group who submitted adopted friendly amendments to the original policy.

3.2 All policies are limited to a 500-word limit but can include appendices that detail research.

#### 4. Policy Duration

4.1 All policy passed becomes part of the Union's 'policy book'. The policy book presents the Union with a set of beliefs and positions to act upon that the student body believes are important.

4.2 The Assembly Procedures Committee reviews the policy book on an annual basis and recommends to the first Assembly of the year which policies are still relevant. This removes the need for policy with a fixed duration/core policy, as every policy becomes a core policy until it is no longer relevant.

4.3 The live policy book will be accessible to the student body as part of the wider Assembly documentation.

#### 5. Emergency Policy

5.1 Emergency policy can only be submitted by the Union Officer Committee and can be submitted to Assembly up to 48 hours before. The purpose of an Emergency Motion is to mandate the union to take a position or action on an issue that has emerged since the policy deadline and is of such importance that Durham students should discuss and act upon it. This could include the union taking a position on a particular piece of new government policy that impacts students or responding to a university decision such as action around a course closure.

5.2 An Emergency Motion should only be used on rare occasions and specific groups of students can request that the Union Officer Committee submit one on their behalf.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Opportunities Officer

RE: Democracy Review Part 2 – Committees and Working Groups

DATE: 3 June 2021

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### **Assembly Notes:**

Durham Students' Union has conducted a review of its democratic processes during the 2021/21 academic year. The work identified a range of areas in need of review, with the most pressing being the Union's Assembly.

In November 2020 Durham SU launched the Democracy Review Survey, which ran until January 2021, collecting over 1000 responses from the student body. In-depth focus groups were carried out with groups of students including key student representatives. The results were collated by development consultants Miragold, and the Democracy Review findings were published to the student body in January 2021.

Key findings from the report were:

- low trust in Durham SU's democratic processes
- communication was a barrier for people finding out about or participating in democracy
- the democratic structures themselves were clunky and difficult to navigate

During February and March 2021 students were asked to consolidate the Democracy Review findings and provide suggestions for the changes they would like to happen. The Opportunities Officer carried out listening exercises with Common Room executives for specific feedback from that constituency, Assembly voting members were contacted to provide their feedback and democracy 'drop-ins' were organised for the wider student body. During April and May, students were invited to workshops to trial new models for Assembly. The focus of the workshops was on motion discussion, membership and meeting structure.

From the various student engagement activities, taking on board student feedback and best practice from other students' unions, a remodeled Assembly has been designed.

Not all the changes that are proposed during student consultation require Standing Order reviews and are actions to be carried out by the organisation that address comments in the initial research. These include, for example, making financial information easier to access online. Many of these changes are straight forward, and a process of implementation will begin over summer.

### **Assembly Believes:**

Many of Durham SU's democratic processes are complex and interdependent with one another, existing in a landscape of multiple democratic systems through the variable Collegiate model and other university structures. Any reform process starts a ripple effect which may continue for some time.

Democratic change in any organisation, and in particular a students' union, should be seen as cyclical and continuous evolution, not once-in-a-lifetime revolution. To effectively develop and embed democratic changes, we must commit to an evolutionary and experimental approach to change, because this won't be perfect in the first cycle. It is clear that in summer 2022, a thorough review of the new model for Assembly will be required, and recommendations for refinement will be necessary.

The purpose of Assembly is to inform the policy direction of Durham Students' Union work between the annual election cycle and hold the elected officers to account on their work and the implementation of the union's policy positions. For the unions' policy work to be effective, we should take a more collaborative and deliberative approach to policy design and debate, along with scrutiny measures addressing its implementation.

The below points are reflective of the Standing Order changes to be made, including some descriptive next. They are not the proposed Standing Order text. By voting on Assembly Resolves DSU will commission new Standing Orders to be written that are reflective of the proposals. The new Standing Orders will be brought before this current Assembly Group for ratification over summer 2021.

## **Assembly Resolves:**

To make effective changes to Assembly's policy development process, the union proposed the following changes, which will require changes to Standing Orders D (Assembly), E (Committees and Forums), G (Student Groups)

### 1. Assembly Frequency

1.1 There should be a minimum of 8 Assemblies per year, or once per month of term. The Assembly Procedures Committee can convene additional Assemblies during the year if needed. Summative Assembly meetings are those which incorporate the full normal agenda of Assembly with the intention of creating policy. Formative Assembly meetings can be focussed on policy development, training, updates, scrutiny or review activities. At least 5 meetings must be Summative Assemblies per year.

1.2 The policy development and implementation cycle will take a minimum of 4 working weeks to complete, not inclusive of convening of the Officer Scrutiny Committee, which will need to meet at least one week before each Assembly.

### 2. Assembly Committees

2.1 Committees of Assembly serve a range of policy and scrutiny functions for a range of student stakeholders and communities.

2.2 Some committees are made up of students who report into Assembly and some of the proposed new groups are made up of Assembly members who will carry out a variety of functions related to the functions and work of Assembly itself.

2.3 Pre-existing committees in the list below will remain part of the Assembly structure and will have their purpose reviewed in a years' time once a cycle of the new Assembly model has been completed.

(SU Committees)

- Academic Affairs Committee (represented on Assembly by the two SU education officers)
- DUCK Committee (represented on Assembly by DUCK Committee Chair)
- Student groups Committee (represented on Assembly by Student Groups Reps)

(Non-SU Committees)

- SU Reps Committee (represented on Assembly by College SU reps)
- JCR Presidents' Committee (represented on Assembly by JCR PresCom Chair)
- MCR Presidents' Committee (represented on Assembly by MCR PresCom Chair)

2.4 Several new committees (listed below) will provide a range of functions for Assembly, providing greater scrutiny and more student ownership. We propose to dissolve Governance and Grants Committee and separate the two functions. The 'governance' aspect of the committee will belong to a new Assembly Procedures Committee and 'grants' will go to Student Groups Committee.

- Officer Scrutiny Committee
- Assembly Procedures Committee
- Union Officer Committee

2.5 Membership to the committees will be elected at the first Assembly meeting of the academic year from within the Assembly membership. There will be no chair elected for each of these committees from within the group and we encourage the committees to trial different models which will be reviewed at the end of the first year. Assembly members elected on to each of the new committees will receive training and support during the duration of their role.

2.6 The committees will be made up of between 5 – 8 members. Terms of reference for each committee will be developed during the first year.

**2.7 Officer Scrutiny Committee** – This committee's role is to hold the SU Sabbatical Officers to account on their manifesto promises and ongoing work. They will also scrutinise the Sabbatical Officers in relation to implementing policies passed by Assembly. The Committee will meet ahead of each Assembly (apart from the first Assembly of the year) along with the Sabbatical Officer Team and they will report back to Assembly on the

progress of the officers' work. Assembly can accept or reject the report or ask for further clarification on areas of work from the Committee. The Officer Scrutiny Committee will not be discussing issues relating to code of conduct or general workplace practice.

**2.8 Assembly Procedures Committee** – This committee exists to maximise student participation in Assembly by increasing accessibility and promoting a culture of respectful debate, and if necessary, create regulations that support the above to be achieved. This committee can call for additional Assemblies to be set, make recommendations to the running of Assembly such as accessibility, ensure procedural motions are interpreted and used effectively and that Standing Orders relating to Assembly are up to date. They will also conduct the annual recommendation of extending union policies. The Committee, along with the Chair, organises the Assembly Agenda in line with the Standing Orders.

**2.9 Union Officer Committee** – This committee is where Durham SU's elected officers come together to prioritise work and determine set by Assembly policy. This committee can also submit emergency policy into Assembly.

### 3. Assembly Task and Finish Groups

3.1 To recognise that there are important pieces of work that are ongoing within the Union and University that students may want to input into but there isn't a representative role on Assembly needed, Assembly members can propose and establish Task and Finish groups over the course of a year who engage and participate in schemes of work that Assembly deem to be a priority. For example, Assembly could appoint a Democracy Review Task and Finish group who feed into work led by the Opportunities Officer or a working group to look at sustainability work across the union and university and ensure that policy which is passed considers sustainability where necessary. The groups, when created, will have a defined purpose and function, along with a proposed time the group will be disbanded. The groups are convened by Assembly members but can report into the body of Assembly when needed. The Chair is responsible for the Task and Finish groups register.

3.2 Applications to establish task and finish groups are received by the Assembly Procedures Committee and reviewed annually. Applications to establish Task and Finish Groups are submitted to Assembly as a motion. Following a successful vote, any student can nominate themselves to be an official member of the Task and Finish group. The group proposer or an elected SU officer can chair the first meeting until a student chair can be elected by the group.

3.3 As part of this first year we will explore how we possibly support SU Officer and student led campaign groups to establish and operate effectively. We will also explore how Assembly has some budgetary responsibility to support work carried out within these groups.



TO: Assembly

FROM: Opportunities Officer

RE: Democracy Review Part 3 – Membership and Purpose

DATE: 3 June 2021

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### **Assembly Notes:**

Durham Students' Union has conducted a review of its democratic processes during the 2021/21 academic year. The work identified a range of areas in need of review, with the most pressing being the Union's Assembly.

In November 2020 Durham SU launched the Democracy Review Survey, which ran until January 2021, collecting over 1000 responses from the student body. In-depth focus groups were carried out with groups of students including key student representatives. The results were collated by development consultants Miragold, and the Democracy Review findings were published to the student body in January 2021.

Key findings from the report were:

- low trust in Durham SU's democratic processes
- communication was a barrier for people finding out about or participating in democracy
- the democratic structures themselves were clunky and difficult to navigate

During February and March 2021 students were asked to consolidate the Democracy Review findings and provide suggestions for the changes they would like to happen. The Opportunities Officer carried out listening exercises with Common Room executives for specific feedback from that constituency, Assembly voting members were contacted to provide their feedback and democracy 'drop-ins' were organised for the wider student body. During April and May, students were invited to workshops to trial new models for Assembly. The focus of the workshops was on motion discussion, membership and meeting structure.

From the various student engagement activities, taking on board student feedback and best practice from other students' unions, a remodeled Assembly has been designed.

Not all the changes that are proposed during student consultation require Standing Order reviews and are actions to be carried out by the organisation that address comments in the initial research. These include, for example, making financial information easier to access online. Many of these changes are straight forward, and a process of implementation will begin over summer.

## **Assembly Believes:**

Many of Durham SU's democratic processes are complex and interdependent with one another, existing in a landscape of multiple democratic systems through the variable Collegiate model and other university structures. Any reform process starts a ripple effect which may continue for some time.

Democratic change in any organisation, and in particular a students' union, should be seen as cyclical and continuous evolution, not once-in-a-lifetime revolution. To effectively develop and embed democratic changes, we must commit to an evolutionary and experimental approach to change, because this won't be perfect in the first cycle. It is clear that in summer 2022, a thorough review of the new model for Assembly will be required, and recommendations for refinement will be necessary.

The purpose of Assembly is to inform the policy direction of Durham Students' Union work between the annual election cycle and hold the elected officers to account on their work and the implementation of the union's policy positions. For the unions' policy work to be effective, we should take a more collaborative and deliberative approach to policy design and debate, along with scrutiny measures addressing its implementation.

The below points are reflective of the Standing Order changes to be made, including some descriptive next. They are not the proposed Standing Order text. By voting on Assembly Resolves DSU will commission new Standing Orders to be written that are reflective of the proposals. The new Standing Orders will be brought before this current Assembly Group for ratification over summer 2021.

## **Assembly Resolves:**

To make effective changes to Assembly's policy development process, the union proposed the following changes, which will require changes to Standing Orders D (Assembly), E (Committees and Forums), H (Academic Representatives)

### **1. Chair**

1.1 The Chair is responsible for the running of Assembly meetings, ensuring members stick to the agenda and that discussion and debate is open and balanced. The chair is a non-voting member of Assembly. In the absence of a Chair, the responsibility falls to either the President or another SU sabbatical officer.

1.2 The Chair should be elected in Easter term by a cross campus ballot and will need to be a student at the institution for the duration of their time in role.

1.3 The Chair, along with the Assembly Procedures Committee, arranges the agenda in line with the Standing Orders.

## 2. Assembly Transparency

2.1 All voting members of Assembly should be made public annually. If a student representative has a compelling case as to why they shouldn't have their name displayed publicly, the SU will display alternative contact details.

2.2 Proposed motions will be shared with the student body ahead of Assembly meetings and passed policy will be shared within three working days of Assembly happening.

2.3 Reports from each of the Assembly committees will also be shared with the student body.

## 3. Voting Rights

3.1 All Assembly members have equal voting rights on Assembly. The Chair of Assembly cannot vote.

3.2 If a vote is tied, the motion falls and can be resubmitted with amendments at the following Assembly.

## 4. Membership

### 4.1

Chair	Non-voting Member
The Sabbatical Officers (x5)	Voting Members
Department Reps (x 27)	Voting Members
College Reps (x 17)	Voting Members
JCR PresComm Chair (x1)	Voting Member
MCR PresComm Chair (x1)	Voting Member
Presidents of recognised Associations (x8)	Voting members
DUCK Committee Chair (x1)	Voting Member
Student Group Reps (x8)	Voting Members
Experience Durham Sabbatical Officer (x1) Team Durham	Voting Member
Non-portfolio Places (x7)	Voting Member

4.2 Within the new Standing Orders, the assigned number of roles where there are multiple postholders (e.g. Association Presidents) will be omitted, allowing Assembly to accommodate any changes to these groups without Standing Order changes.

4.3 How individual Assembly members are voted into their positions will be defined in the Standing Orders relating to their roles/areas.

4.4 By creating 7 non-portfolio places for Assembly, we are able to give more access to students who don't have preexisting representative roles but who want to get involved more in Durham SU's democracy. We will elect this group during a summer term election period and will use university demographics data determine who may fill those places, for example we may weight them to ensure some of the positions are reserved for people of colour. We understand that this process will require some experimentation in its design and implementation.

4.5 We have increased the number of people on Assembly representing academic interests of students. This is because academic representation is a fundamental part of Durham SU's purpose and a space un-replicated by other student communities.