

**Durham Students' Union
Assembly Agenda (COVID-19 Special)**

Thursday 26 November 2020, 18:00, Virtual meeting, Zoom

Time	Subject	Who	Paper
18:00 18:02	A. Welcome	Chair	
18:02 18:05	B. Minutes of the meeting on 29 October 2020	Chair	UA/2021/10
18:05 18:10	C. Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest	Chair	

Routine Business:

18:10 18:15	D. Chairs Election	Chair	
18:15 18:20	E. Elections Update	Gareth Hughes	

Items for Discussion:

18:20 18:30	F. The Future of Education under COVID-19 <i>SU Core Position</i>	Officers	UA/2021/11
18:30 18:40	G. Housing and Accommodation through COVID-19 <i>SU Core Position</i>	Officers	UA/2021/12
18:40 18:50	H. Wider Student Experience through COVID-19 <i>SU Core Position</i>	Officers	UA/2021/13
18:50 19:00	I. Cut the Rent	Emily Jolliffe	UA/2021/14
19:00 19:10	J. Condemn the actions of Durham Union Society	Yash Raju	UA2021/15

****Access Break****

Routine Business (Updates)

19:10	K. Officer Updates	Officers	UA/2021/16
19:20			
19:20	L. Committee Questions*	Committee Chairs	
19:40			
19:40	M. Association Questions**	Association Chairs	
20:00			

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

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

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

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

Thursday 29 October 2020, Virtual meeting, Zoom

Item A - Welcome

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

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

Item B – Introduction to Assembly

ST provided an introduction to Assembly for new members.

Item C - Minutes of the meeting on 14 May 2020

No amendments to minutes of the last meeting.

Minutes from the last meeting were approved.

Item D - Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest

There were no apologies or conflicts of interest.

Item E – Chairs Election

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

ST will Chair the meeting until someone is elected.

Item F – Open Positions Election

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

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

Open Position

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

Postgraduate Position

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

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

Open Position (Women/Carer)

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

CG delivers hust for Open Position (Women/Carer)

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

Open Position (First year undergraduate)

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

RV delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

JC delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

KS delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

BL delivers hust for Open Position (First year undergraduate)

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

Item G – Governance and Grants Committee Election

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

Student Group Positions

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

KL delivers hust for Student Group Position.

Open Places

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

YR delivers hust for Open Position.

Item H – Board Update

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

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

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

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

Item I – Officer Updates

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

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

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

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

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

Item J – Committee Updates

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

(Apologies from DUCK and Academic Affairs Committee)

Governance and Grants Committee members were elected at this meeting.

Item K – Association Updates

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

(Apologies from Trans Association and International Students' Association)

****ACCESS BREAK****

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

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

Item L – Amendment to Standing Order D

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

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

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

ST moves to the vote (zoom poll initiated)

The motion passes.

Item M – Democracy Review Update

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

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

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

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

SW asked what the scale of the review was.

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

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

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

ST moves to the vote (zoom poll initiated)

The motion passes.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Nailah Haque & Sarah McAllister

RE: The future of education under Covid-19: SU Core Position

DATE: 26 November 2020

Assembly notes:

- All students have seen disruption to their studies due to the Covid-19 pandemic in some way.
- Students had the option this year to study in person or online only.
- The University successfully put in place several blanket mitigations for all students last year.
- Durham SU will continue to support academic societies in providing informal spaces to support students with their learning and development.

Assembly believes:

- that blended learning should continue, but with a greater focus on student choice and flexibility.
- That students should receive timely feedback, in order to learn from feedback and improve on that performance in further assessments.
- That every student deserves fair and equal access to their education
- The University has a duty to ensure the health and safety of staff and this must extend to greater consideration of increased workloads during COVID restrictions.

Assembly resolves:

- To lobby the University to address ongoing issues of digital poverty
- The University should ensure that study spaces are open and safe for students to use.
- The University should increase its efforts to make course material more accessible to all students.
- Postgraduate researchers who teach should continue to be properly trained, supported and paid where they are involved in teaching and academic support work.
- For the academic officers to lobby for an automatic one-week extension, when it is asked for by students, as well as the re-introduction of the [No Detriment policy](#) for both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught students, similar to that of academic year 2019/2020.

- To lobby the University for appropriate equivalent mitigations for postgraduate researchers.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Officer Team
RE: Housing and Accommodation through COVID-19: *SU Core Position*
DATE: 26 November 2020

Assembly notes:

- Young people (aged 16-25) are twice as likely to have suffered job loss due to the pandemic compared to older employees¹
- Since the beginning of the pandemic, Durham SU has worked to ensure that student renters are aware of their rights and are treated fairly²
- Ongoing restrictions mean that some students may not be able to return home over the Christmas period
- Some students may not be able to, or may not wish to, return to Durham for Epiphany term
- Despite current restrictions, the Housing Market in England remains open³

Assembly believes:

- That the safety of student renters should be prioritised through the use of virtual viewings and other appropriate safety measures during the house-signing process
- That Durham SU should continue to support student renters by promoting tenants' rights (particularly the right to decline entry to a property) and the values outlined in the Student-Landlord Pledge
- That students should not face additional accommodation fees if circumstances resulting from the pandemic mean they cannot travel home
- That students living in University-owned accommodation or Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) who choose not to return to Durham for Epiphany term should not continue to be charged accommodation fees
- That students living in privately rented accommodation who choose not to return to Durham for Epiphany term should be treated fairly and with compassion and flexibility

Assembly resolves:

- To lobby Durham University to ensure that students who cannot return home over Christmas do not face additional accommodation fees for 2020/201 academic year

¹ Major et al (2020). Generation Covid: Emerging work and education inequalities.
<http://cep.lse.ac.uk/pubs/download/cepcovid-19-011.pdf>

² Through [the Student-Landlord Pledge](#), [lobbying PBSAs](#), the [Take Time to Sign Campaign](#) and by increasing capacity of the Advice Service

³ Gov.UK (2020). Government advice on home moving during the coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak.
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/government-advice-on-home-moving-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

- To lobby Durham University to terminate tenancy agreements early for students who cannot, or do not wish to, return to Durham for Epiphany Term 2021
- To lobby PBSA providers to terminate tenancy agreements early for students who cannot, or do not wish to, return to Durham for Epiphany Term 2021
- To renew the Student-Landlord Pledge and continue work with private landlords and agents to ensure student tenants are treated fairly and with compassion and flexibility
- To continue to promote tenants' rights and the prioritisation of tenants' safety

TO: Assembly

FROM: SU Officer Team

RE: Wider Student Experience through COVID-19: *SU Core Position*

DATE: 26 November 2020

Assembly Notes:

- The importance and value that engaging in Wider Student Experience (WSE) has on students' mental and physical wellbeing.
- Participation in WSE also enhances students' academic experience
- The pandemic has limited the ability for WSE to take place as normal and many activities will need to be delivered online.
- Many students value face-to-face WSE as beneficial to their mental health.
- Some students will be unable to return to Durham for Epiphany term and will only experience WSE online.

Assembly Believes:

- Providing high quality WSE that is accessible and inclusive should remain a priority and the University should be proactive, not only in sourcing opportunities for all students to participate in, but also in protecting and enhancing those which currently exist.
- Face-to-face WSE activities should continue with key focus on creating quality interactions that are accessible to a broad section of the student body, removing any unnecessary barriers to students that may prevent access.
- It should be a priority for an Academic and WSE balance to be found and students should continue to have the flexibility to participate in WSE.
- The University has a duty to provide support and options to those students only able to engage in WSE online. It should be a priority that these opportunities are not a quick fix and the University should use this as an opportunity to hold onto the accessibility gains which these new spaces have created, providing online WSE with greater longevity.
- Livers out should be prioritised to ensure that they are able to engage with WSE during periods of heightened restrictions, with specific emphasis on communication from both the University and individual Colleges.
- Student Leaders are integral in enabling WSE.

Assembly Resolves:

- To lobby the University to provide both online and in-person WSE opportunities
- To lobby the University to provide high quality online opportunities that will remain beyond the pandemic.

- To ensure all WSE activities take place in a controlled, risk-assessed manner, in line with current legislation and guidelines.
- To lobby the University to remove unnecessary barriers that may prevent participation in WSE, including membership of specific groups.
- To lobby the University to provide grant funding for public initiatives to increase the availability and accessibility of face-to-face opportunities.
- To lobby the University to ensure a balance remains between WSE opportunities and Academic Commitments. This includes a guarantee that Academic workload remains the same as with previous years and Wednesday afternoons remain free.
- To ensure the University provides Student Leaders with thorough and clear communication about their short term and long term plans for how WSE will be affected and activities carried out.
- To lobby the University to create a peer support network for Student Leaders during this time.
- Support services for students, both across the University and in individual colleges, should be appropriately funded and supported during this period, especially with regard to increasing their visibility to students.
- The Students' Union will provide resources and training to Student Group Exec members to ensure they are confident in running safe and inclusive online events.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Emily Jolliffe

RE: Cut the Rent

DATE: 26 November 2020

Assembly notes

- College accommodation fees cost well above the average maintenance loan for students and have risen above inflation for many years.
- The numbers of students returning to live in college after first year have dwindled over this time.
- Durham University currently fails to meet the NUS recommendation that 25% of first-year accommodation be affordable (50% of the maximum maintenance loan).
- Durham University has significantly cut, reduced and centralised staffing and facilities within colleges – such as portering, cleaning and catering – to the detriment of student experience.
- This trend has continued and worsened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Durham University currently provides no public breakdown to students of how college accommodation fees are spent – previous FOI requests indicate that as little as 50% is spent directly in colleges.
- Assembly has previously committed on several occasions to supporting the Ripped Off campaign and its objects.

Assembly believes

- The lack of affordable accommodation available at Durham University prices out lower-income students, contributing to a longstanding elitist culture at the institution.
- Last year's rent increase did not even benefit staff in colleges, who are facing unprecedented cutbacks and a culture of disrespect.
- Students have a right to know in detail how their money is spent, be that within JCRs, the SU, or the University.
- Unreasonable fees put off students from returning to live in college, damaging JCRs and college communities, limiting students' options, and putting further pressure on Durham's already-extortionate private renting market.
- The University's response to COVID-19 in colleges has been sub-standard, with many of the attacks on colleges threatened by BPR2 continuing under a different guise, on top of poor planning for feeding isolating students and poor communication to students.
- Previous actions taken to combat accommodation fees have had limited effectiveness.
- Given that currently the demands of the Ripped Off Campaign are unclear to most students, therefore it would benefit the Ripped Off Campaign to have a

clear set of demands to the university on our expectations of affordability, such that having these demands met can be the condition for concluding any future action.

Assembly resolves

- To publish and support these demands as the demands of the Ripped Off Campaign:
 1. Immediate cap on fees for a standard, single catered rooms to be £6746.¹
 2. We demand an annually published breakdown of how college accommodation fees are spent.
 3. At least 25% of rooms to be at 50% of the maximum maintenance loan, which will currently be £4601.50.²
 4. To have a significant discount for returners living in college, to enable the university to reach its aspirations of housing 50-55% of students in College-affiliated accommodation by 2027 to maintain strong college identities and communities.³

Affordability, differentiation, transparency, community.

- To mandate the relevant officers to communicate these demands to university management.
- To support, as far as possible, actions taken to bring about the fruition of these demands.

¹ This is based on SU research on the Funding Gap and Cost of Attendance.

² This is an NUS recommendation, based on the understanding of affordability as proportionate to the money you have available to you, rather than relatively cheap, or poorer quality. The figure of £4601.50 would close the funding gap for anyone with a household income of £43k or less.

³ https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/about/DurhamUniversityMasterplanExecutiveSummaryRevCSML.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1s6x8AWbRg43zSMHV-6UCqifyA0Zl8Houdn8JfBWv4fveJG5kBzWa_nEM. P4. This supports college communities – college events e.g. formals are often well supported because returners propagate a culture of going to these events. The university is Durham's biggest landlord, and more returners living in college (as opposed to signing houses in September for the next academic year) will help to relieve the pressure on student housing in Durham. This is also to reflect the fact that people who live in again after first year have already paid for certain college facilities and services- see Aidan's FOI - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_nkRJ6TiojT3hz9uL57Ip5PqehW8ONBH/view?usp=sharing

TO: Assembly
FROM: Yash Raju
RE: Motion to condemn the actions of the Durham Union Society
DATE: 26 November 2020

Assembly Notes

The Durham Union Society (DUS) has failed to prevent and effectively penalise incidents of racism/misogyny amongst both its membership and leadership. The assembly notes that solutions suggested to reform the DUS have been unsuccessful in transforming the institution into an organisation which protects its membership and the wider student body from discrimination.

Assembly Believes

Organisations within Durham University which fail to effectively combat discrimination should not be supported by the Student Union. The assembly believes that the failures to combat discrimination by the DUS are due to the institution actively choosing to protect senior members who hold discriminatory views over the welfare of its own membership. This assembly believes that the DUS is capable of causing significant harm to students from marginalised backgrounds due to its lack of safeguarding systems including an effective complaints process, code of conduct for its senior leadership and refusal to acknowledge or penalise the discriminatory actions of its members.

Assembly Resolves

To ban the DUS from participating in our events and to strongly encourage Sabbatical Officers not to participate in DUS events. The assembly also resolves to publicly separate itself from the DUS by not advertising events held by the DUS or promoting the organisation to its members. The assembly also resolves to not host events of the DUS in Dunelm House.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Anna Marshall
RE: Opportunities Officer Report
DATE: 26 November 2020

Update on priorities:

Democracy –

The Democracy Review survey is now live, having launched on the 18th November. We need a minimum of 300 responses, but I'll be satisfied when we get to 1000. It takes on average 15 minutes to complete, and 13 ambassadors have been recruited to try and maximise the number of submissions. This is projected to be open until the 9th December – this date will be upon us soon so I'd really urge everyone to complete it whilst it's on their minds. MiraGold will be conducting at least 18 focus groups to dive into the deeper meaning of these results, working with a student researcher who has also now been recruited.

Sustainability –

Written a motion to be presented for the Tyne and Wear Citizens Assembly, looking to tackle air pollution through better public transport, better green spaces and organisational pledges.

Planned an environment forum across the different Durham groups which should occur in the first week of December, to set annual objectives for Durham campus community. Relaunched the SDG Instagram, currently focussing on Goal Three of Health.

Spoken to NUS/SOS UK about the University's divestment plans

Bolstering community –

Reacted to the lockdown guidance which forced all Durham SU groups to stop group face-to-face activity. Asked the University to fund creative outdoor socially-distanced projects next year such as outdoors calisthenics equipment or outdoor light exhibitions. Invited every student group exec to meet with me over two days, which led to some insightful conversations. Planning for a smoother Epiphany term, with another online 'freshers fair' and clearer protocols for how groups can operate under different tiers of lockdown.

General updates:

Communications and transparency: The new real living wage was announced by the Real Living Wage Foundation, at £9.50 per hour outside of London. I've trialled doing an SU drop-in specifically for common room presidents, and another one for student group execs, but need to promote this more in order for it to be effective.

Charity Christmas Tree Initiative: Worked with the University Library team to take their annual Christmas fundraiser online. Chose two local charities for students and staff to donate to: Refuse Café in Chester-Le-Street, and Children North East. Refuse rescue food which would otherwise go to waste, and use it to run a pay-as-you-feel community café. They were established by a Durham graduate and assist vulnerable members of the community during normal times, and like many other organisations, will be feeling the strain of 2020. Look out for the launch of this.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Seun Twins
RE: President Report
DATE: 26 November 2020

Priorities Update:

Update on Culture Commission

- Feedback form is being launched next Monday, one opportunity for you to shape the commission and have your experience heard whether it be positive, negative or somewhere in between on what 'Durham's Culture' is.
- W/c 30th will be holding contribution sessions ran by either myself or the Commissioners- you can sign up for them here:
<https://durhamsu.ml/research/avo/sign-up-initial-contribution-sessions-culture-commission/140/>
- The Commissioners and I had our first proper meeting! Profiles on them and why they wanted to be part of the Commission will be launched on the website next week!
- We have also recruited Meg Haskins to be one of the Commissioners (former SU Welfare and Liberation Officer and was also involved in the original Respect Commission)
- We are finalising the Independent Commissioner and will be announcing them next week!
- We have been working on creating branding for the Culture Commission (stay tuned for all that excitement)

Covid Updates:

- Mass testing being carried out
- Self-test model being used. Students and staff watch a short video on duo, take a quiz to check understanding and then take the test. Will receive results themselves straight away.
- Discussions on ensuring accessibility of mass testing for Livers out.
- Testing sites for Livers out include Palace Green, RaceCourse, Sport and Wellbeing Park.
- Planning how to ensure peace of mind for students when travelling home
- Discussions on January returners and how the university will be supporting them,
- Regular testing planned for epiphany term to open up more Wider Student Experience opportunities.
- Uni working on comms to encourage as many students as possible to get tested.

General Updates:

- Started the recruitment process for the new Vice-Chancellor
- Panellist for NUS Decolonising in Practice panel
- Student Voice Conference 'Making an impact' panel for Open University
- Meeting attended: University Brexit Group
 - Finance Committee
 - University Strategy Implementation Committee
 - Operations Board
 - Mount Oswald Programme Board

TO: Assembly

FROM: Sarah McAllister

RE: Postgraduate Academic Officer Report

DATE: 26 October 2020

Update on priorities:

COVID-19 and Education

- SU Stance on Education through Covid-19 – Since the last assembly, Nailah and I have listened to student opinion on teaching and learning during Covid-19, and developed a stance on what you should be able to expect from the University. This will be discussed in greater detail later in Assembly.
- UKRI Response – The announcement from UKRI has understandably frustrated and angered PGR Students. I have signed a letter from Postgraduate SU Officers, asking UKRI to change their position and resume funding for students for as long as it takes for them to finish their studies. I lobbied the University for the continued waiving of fees for extensions, as well as a continuation of stipends to make sure that students are not left without funds to continue, as was agreed in the last national lockdown. You can read my full response here: <https://www.durhamsu.com/articles/update-from-sarah-response-to-ukri-announcement-on-pg-funding>

Interconnected PG Communities

- Academic Communities - Due to the pandemic, the number of peer-to-peer discussions and support that usually take place has been detrimentally impacted. I have raised this in a number of University spaces, including the Teaching and Research Recovery Groups, which has facilitated discussions about both how departments and student representatives can facilitate this aspect of Postgraduate life. I have also been working with Jun Jie Wu (Deputy Executive Dean in Science) as she is running STEM chat on Teams, which aims to support new PGRS by connecting them to their peers and others.
- Postgraduate Networking - We have set up a networking form to facilitate PGs meeting other PGs.
- Set up Postgraduate Leaders Network – I have also set up a PG Leaders Group on Facebook to help network amongst the MCR Presidents, PG Faculty Reps, Associations and other PG leaders across Durham. If you think you have a role that would mean you should be in this group, just pop me a message.
- Working with MCR PresComm – I have also been working with MCR PresComm to discuss how we can improve the Postgraduate experience during the pandemic.

Capturing the range of PG Experiences

- PG Mental Health – Alongside the work on communities, I have been looking at how we can support Postgraduate Mental Health. This is something that I have been raising at University meetings and started to put some plans in place for the rest of term. The notable example of this was at the Student Support and Wellbeing Sub-Committee where the student representatives attending provided feedback with current levels of support for students in both a student support and academic support with a particular emphasis on Joint honours at UG, and the levels of support for PGTs and PGRs.
- Digital Poverty – Nailah and I have expressed a number of concerns around the current provisions provided the University for those who need support to access technology. This is something we are currently challenging, in particular around the advertising for the loan laptops that CIS provide and the use of household income to determine eligibility which raises a number of issues for Postgraduate students.
- Postgraduate Experience Survey – At the end of this term, I will begin to plan the Survey which we are planning to run next term.

Postgraduate Access and Participation

- Collating responses on admissions and enrolment - I have been collating the data we received in the PG survey at the beginning of the year about admissions and enrolment alongside the work from the PGT advisory boards last year to highlight the issues in the current system.
- PG Funding - I filmed a video, alongside Ewan Swift, answering some of your questions relating to PG Funding which will be going live on our social media channels soon. I have also been talking to members of University staff about the extension of the 25% PGT alumni discount beyond this academic year.
- Creating a Postgraduate Access and Participation Policy – The current Access and Participation policy is very centric on the Undergraduate experience; therefore, I have been working on how we can create a policy which fits with the Postgraduate experience, this work is still in its infancy.

General updates:

- Attend a National Postgraduate Officers call where we discussed different issues that Postgrads are facing around the UK, how we have dealt with the impact of the pandemic, campaigns that we are running and how we can work together to tackle national issues.
- Created a round for the Inter-MCR Pub Quiz
- Attended a meeting about improvements for space for PGR students.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Nailah Haque
RE: UG Academic Officer Report
DATE: 26 November 2020

Update on priorities:

- Making sure students are aware of how they can go about finding and filling out a SAC form
- Ensuring that comms regarding mitigating circumstances and a no-detriment policy is clear and transparent from the University

General updates:

The series of workshops which are being hosted by Tony Fawcett have begun which means that departments are getting the opportunity to talk to each other and the DSU about good practice and what steps need to be taken to move the Decolonise initiative forward. I've also started speaking to associations about how they can be involved – DPOCA and Woman's association have agreed to create reviews of different texts and resources for the Decolonise Network.

Have been in multiple conversations about academic support and how that can be improved and what information regarding wellbeing needs to be on the DU website. Currently I'm pushing for academic advisors to be more active, which involves them reaching out to students rather than relying on students asking them for help first.

Me and Sarah also had a drop-in session where students could ask us questions or tell us their concerns etc.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Ewan Swift
RE: Welfare and Liberation Officer Report
DATE: 26 November 2020

Update on priorities:

Housing and Accommodation

- **Accommodation Fees Forum** – discussed and solidified our demands for an accommodation fees review with student leaders
- **Accreditation Schemes Report** – doing research into schemes and initiatives at other university and seeing how they could be implemented in Durham
- Met with the Director of Student Support and Wellbeing to discuss the university's involvement in an accreditation scheme
- Formulated stance on housing and accommodation moving forward

Safety and Culture

- **Sexual Misconduct and Violence Operations Group** - gained backing to push for the implementation of Active Bystander Training for all students next year
- **Active Bystander Training** – working with Experience Durham to organise another round of training for sports, music and theatre groups
- **Health and Wellbeing Strategy** – pushed the university to ensure that a review of their drugs policy is actioned within the strategy
- **Welfare Forum** – planning for a forum on drug harm reduction within universities for the end of term
- Reviewed the university's new EDI objectives
- Met with the Community Liaison Officer to discuss the Community Response Team and student safety concerns
- Sat on the selection panel for the Respect Oversight Group

Student Support

- **Student Support Review** – pushed for greater student consultation and currently setting up a working group with student leaders for next term
- **PG Mental Health** – ensured this is a dedicated discussion in future meetings of student support and wellbeing groups
- **Departmental Support** - raised issues around inconsistencies in academic and pastoral support within departments and the academic advisor system
- Discussed proposals around a “Student Support Hub” within faculties

General updates:

Covid-19

- **Covid-19 Christmas Working Group** – chaotic but I'm really pushing for better communication, more clarity, and greater focus on scenario planning the offers that may be available over Christmas and come January
- **Covid-19 Response Group** – meeting with the SU leadership team to address the immediate concerns arising as we respond to the lockdown
- Gathering insights on the greatest problems being faced by students right now and concerns for Christmas and next term
- Met with the International Students Association to gain a better understanding of the acute worries which students staying in Durham over Christmas have

Other

- Holding drop-ins for Associations and Liberation Groups within the SU
- Met with the Leeds SU Welfare Officer to discuss work being done to tackle Sexual Misconduct and Violence