

**Durham Students' Union  
Assembly Agenda**

Thursday 29 October 2020, 18:00, Virtual meeting, Zoom

<b>Time</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Paper</b>
18:00 18:05	A. Welcome	Chair	
18:05 18:10	B. Introduction to Assembly	Chair	
18:10 18:13	C. Minutes of the meeting on 14 May 2020	Chair	UA/2021/02
18:13 18:15	D. Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest	Chair	
<b>Routine Business</b>			
18:15 18:20	E. Chairs Election	Chair	
18:25 18:30	F. Open Positions Election	Chair	
18:30 18:35	G. Governance and Grants Committee Election	Chair	
18:35 18:40	H. Board Update	President	UA/2021/03
18:40 18:50	I. Officer Updates	Officers	UA/2021/04
18:50 19:10	J. Committee Updates*	Committee Chairs	UA/2021/05
19:10 19:30	K. Association Updates**	Association Chairs	

**\*\*Access Break\*\***

**Items for Discussion:**

19:30 19:40	L. Amendment to Standing Orders	President	UA/2021/06
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19:40	M. Democracy Review	Opportunities Officer	UA/2021/07
19:50	Update		
19:50	N. Amendment to Equality and Diversity:	President	UA/2021/08
20:00	<i>SU Core Policy</i>		

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

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

Thursday 14th May 2020, 16:30, Virtual meeting, Zoom

**Item A - Welcome**

JM - opens meeting. Explains zoom etiquette and that there is a media observer in attendance.

**Item B - Minutes of the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February and on 12<sup>th</sup> March**

No amendments to minutes from either meeting.

Minutes from both meetings were approved.

**Item C - Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest**

JM – Apologies received from student groups committee, trans association and academic affairs committee.

**Item D - Censure Investigation Outcome**

JM - censure investigation into Kate McIntosh occurred and found that there was no case to answer.

**Item E - Board Update**

KM - presents board update from 14<sup>th</sup> May meeting. Board discussed issues arising in the next 6 months relating to Durham SU finances and the strategy. New strategy approved to take the organisation through this period and happy to take any questions.

JM – any questions on board update

No questions asked.

**Item F - Officer Questions**

JM - Question for Kate – “I would like to know what is being done about the University still charging full tuition fees?”

KM – the university’s current direction is focused on ensuring the financial sustainability of the organisation over this period and are therefore not considering tuition fee refunds at this point. The NUS are campaigning for tuition fee refunds as part of their ‘safety net’ campaign

and if we are going to see a change in this it's likely to come from a national effort such as this. This is also something that is a longer term priority for the SU and not an immediate concern, there are some things we can solve quickly which is something we've been focusing on.

JM – Question for Kate – “How will officer roles be handed over?”

KM – outlines plan for officer induction but explains that it won't be done in the same way as previous due to the likely need for online delivery. There are new University committees set up to respond to covid-19 stuff and we've asked for the University to play a role in inducting the officers into those spaces.

JM – Question for Kate – “What sub-groups need student reps? When apps open how to students reply? Responses from Council on decolonisation motion and disablist motion?”

KM - Sub-groups are now changing as the immediate crisis has altered. Now looking at forward planning. Two student reps on each of these groups. Opportunity for more students to feed in. Probably already elected students e.g. Officers, JCR presidents, faculty reps. In relation to Council's responses - disablist motion got a full response which we are pushing to make public. The work is ongoing but good we got a response. Decolonisation response was a paper that was co-written by Sam (UG Academic Officer). This work is also ongoing.

AMc - Nothing that Council said that we weren't expecting, but Covid-19 has thrown us into a new world. A lot of the things we asked for have shifted and been done already. Disabled students' access has appeared overnight due to changes made for Covid-19. Working with Jess Madden and SwDA to make the motion relevant to Covid-19 now.

SJA – on the paper that went to Council co-written by Sam. University developing an inclusive teaching package. Work to make sure the University understand decolonisation is not just an inclusive teaching package and goes further. Conversations with People of Colour Association and others to develop resources to help aide understanding of what decolonisation actually is.

JM – Question for David – “Is it not inappropriate to reschedule tuition fee payment? We're not currently even getting what we're paid for.”

DE – has looked in to this and believes there is some confusion as to what the dates were. A finance document from earlier in the year said the payment date was 11 May. Sympathetic with lack of resources point. University is allowed to do this, which is why they continue to do so. This sets a low standard. Doesn't think that paying tuition fees now would weaken position about reclaiming them. Recommend keeping notes of what opportunities you expected to get that you have now lost as a result of disruption. Contact the SU Advice Service for more information about reclaiming money for disruption. On no detriment, making sure you keep notes of the opportunities that have been missed – that's the route to complain down, would very much push back on the idea that no detriment is a bad thing.

### **Item G - Committee Questions**

JM – no questions for committees were received.

**Item H - Association Questions**

JM – no questions for associations were received.

**\*Democracy Report Statements\* (not agenda item)**

JM – invites SW and AM to give pre-planned statements regarding the democracy report.

SW – democracy report is means to an end goal, can safely say that the report was disappointing in quite a lot of ways. Seriously regrettably how many people were interviewed for it. It has made the outcome quite one sided, not touching on structural issues or the election. Disappointing that many more students wanted to be involved but were not contacted to take part. On a personal note, I was not expecting to be name checked and feel uncomfortable being. Statement provides criticisms of the report released regarding Durham SU democracy. SW is concerned that it is one-sided and not well-publicised. Believes it's important that the review did happen and that it's a starting point and that the full scale democracy review is still needed. Believes that serious change is needed through a review that is totally transparent. Questions, who is leading the next stage of the democracy review? What are the initial plans for how the review will be done? How will students be included and kept informed? How can students get involved?

AM – thanks SW for statement. Wasn't involved in the commissioning of the report but AM thinks the next step is focusing on the conclusions of the report. Do we need to overhaul the democratic structures – the answer is yes. Level of deception is really problematic and we need to ensure that doesn't happen again. Don't want a repeat of this year and need to make sure students are getting to the democratic structures available to them and that they need. In terms of how the democratic review will be conducted, conducting any level of review requires it to be designed in some way, and when the topic is on democracy and representation it's more difficult. The only way to make sure the real stage of the review is done well is that these voices come forward and make sure it's a professionally done review. All these issues that people are talking about relating to lack of consultation and lack of transparency – we can all only represent ourselves – my appeal right now is for as many diverse groups to come forward and find a solution. Online discourse that we've seen over the past few months has been done in a quarantine – how can we come together as a community and make direct change rather than focusing on the past.

JM – in agreement with both of those sentiments. The report had elements that certainly were disappointing to lots of people but does very much share the sentiment that that was a temperature gauge and that there will be more opportunity for us to pull together and make something better. Encourage anyone and everyone to get in touch to be involved. The report was very focused on Assembly but exciting times in the future.

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

### **Item I - COVID-19 Core Position**

JM – explains that debate will follow same format as normal but extra time allowed. Invites KM to speak on this.

KM – summary of position – in response to Covid-19 the university moved to online teaching and made a series of big decisions in quick succession and dealing with covid-19 is a really big task. This position expresses the hard lines in what the University should cut and what it shouldn't. It expresses what we should safeguard and protect. Students' rights as students and student communities. The pandemic is going to have big effects on education at Durham, and also probably long-term direction of the Uni. When the university makes decisions, students need to be at the centre of decision making and it has to come from students, in everything the university is doing.

JM – any questions for clarification?

JMad – sent through some amendments and want to make sure they were received

JM – confirming they are typos rather than content amendments

JMad – confirms

JM – any speech opposing the motion?

No speech opposing the motion

JM – any general comments?

No general comments

JM – we'll now move to a vote (zoom poll initiated)

Motion passes.

### **Item J - Finding a Silver Lining: Carrying forward improvement to accessibility post Covid-19 in Durham**

JMad – this is semi-linked to the disablist motion. It's making sure that what happens nationally also happens at Durham. Activists have been told that disabled students couldn't have the choice for alternative assessments etc. and now due to covid-19 that has been proven to be possible and we'd like to have a silver lining in this situation in keeping the worthwhile changes that have been made.

JM – any questions for clarification?

KE – could this motion be applied to students with mental health challenges who have been treated by the university in a similar way, or if not could we extend it to cover them too?

JMad – yes it does cover students with mental health problems and the university considers mental health under the disability bracket, so it would include those students anyway.

JM – asks for speech opposing the motion?

No speech opposing the motion

JM – any general comments?

LH – students from John's would like to see a standard way for teaching online and know that people teaching online have the right qualifications to do so. Also wanted to note that students with dyslexia are not allowed to record lectures online.

JMad – SwDA are working towards all students having the option to record, this motion is more to specify that students support these changes being made permanent.

AMc – had a conversation last week with head of disability support about how the service is coping with the switch to online, and was told there were no problems they were aware of so would advise students to go to disability services and go to advice service if they are encountering problems such as this.

SJA – a lot of the issue we've seen recently in the university is with them using the fact that things are online to shirk their responsibilities in other areas. It encompasses everything, so if there are cases where the university is using things being online as an excuse, get in touch with us to share these examples so we can feed these in.

JM – anyone wanting to do a summation

JM – moves to a vote (zoom poll initiated)

Motion passes

### **Item K - Academic Support Core Position**

SJA – core position was drafted by academic affairs committee. The university's academic support is bad, and the purpose of this motion is to push the university to have a more standard level of academic support so that it is less of a lottery as it is currently. Take into account that the right time and resources are allocated for academic support rather than it being an add-on to the workload that academic staff have already. Part of this should be mental health first aid and is not a good situation if these individuals have not had training.

JM – any requests for clarification?

SW – wanted to clarify under the paragraph about the change and responsibility, it talks about the introduction of a standard list of responsibilities for academics. SW concern is that by department it may vary quite differently depending on which department you're in. Also making sure that academics don't have to just do a box ticking exercise and that they do need to have some freedom while there is still a basic standard.

SJA – oftentimes the university, in a cynical manner, uses excuses of departmental autonomy to remove the need to have that standardisation. A standard list would still include things that all departments would so but agree there are things that you would need in some departments than in others.

SW – agrees and sounds like something the University might do. Something that can be all looked at later and would be down to who was pursuing that in future.

JM – a speech opposing the motion?

No speech opposing the motion

JM – any general comments

AMc – in terms of minimum requirements for departments to not shirk their responsibilities - some depts. are seeing their academic staff as purely academics and some are seeing them as giving pastoral care. Having an actual requirement for what support should be as a minimum and us having a vision on what that should look like is important. They have a minimum duty of care that we need to put firmly on their radar.

LH – students at John's are aware that they are slipping through the cracks when they're taking courses that span over multiple departments.

SJA – agrees that this is the case

LH – the motion suggests we should lobby the university to put in place training for staff – is this department specific and what exists currently?

SJA – nothing in place currently, some department specific stuff could be worthwhile but there is no training in place that we're aware of currently. Training in motion relates to the minimum standard across depts.

LH – suggests that it might not be a lack of training but a lack of communication between modules and departments?

DE – to add context there was no training for students supervising PHDs, so it's very unlikely that there's any training that exists for academic support. Having something that is standard and also applicable to each department is what we should lobby for. Minimum standard saying anyone delivering academic support should deliver this. It's making sure students who are experts in each discipline feed into making sure departmental differences are considered.

LH – last thing that John's students want to bring up was on the mentor system mentioned in the motion and what this would mean?

SJA – explains that this would be people that already exist within the University and drawing upon this network, for instance people who are a first generation scholar would be able to have a mentor from the first gen mentor network. Making sure that there is a push throughout the university to make sure that if students want that option that is made available to them.

LH – so would there be mentors from outside the university to help current students?

SJA – the thinking was from within the university community and using existing networks and academics who already do that work. Better coordination for the students from 'non-traditional backgrounds' to have access to staff in with university from similar backgrounds to have that opportunity for a positive mentor relationship



JM – summation?

SJA – summarises motion, academic support should be more standard and bad experiences with academic support minimised

JM – move to a vote (zoom poll initiated)

JM – motion passes

JM – closes meeting, thank you. Reiterates that if you do not want personal information to be in recording send in to [dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk](mailto:dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk) before 18<sup>th</sup> May.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Seun Twins  
RE: Durham SU Board of Trustees Update  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT TO ASSEMBLY

The Durham SU Board of Trustees is the group with ultimate responsibility for the students' union, including its governance, strategy, budget, risk, and processes. The trustees meet regularly to make sure that Durham SU is on track with its agreed strategy and serving Durham students.

The Board and Assembly are provided with a report of the others' activities, so that they can discharge their responsibilities properly, knowing what has been of interest at each meeting.

The Board often discusses confidential or sensitive material, and this report is therefore a brief synopsis of the matters discussed.

The Board of Trustees met on 14 October 2020 and considered the following matters.

### *A Consultation on Student Trustees*

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.

The communication of the decision will follow in the next week.

### *Student Group de-registration*

The trustees confirmed the decision taken to deregister two Durham SU student groups.

### *Democratic Framework*

The trustees discussed the interrelated activities which are seeking to develop Durham SU's democratic framework, including the management of Assembly. 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.

### *Plan of Action*

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.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Nailah Haque  
RE: UG Academic officer Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## Update on priorities:

## General updates:

Have been in 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 and alleviating said 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 and how the DSU can support their stance and the divergences in interests there may be between the two unions.

Decol paper has been presented and passed through senate which details the business outline for the decolonise interns which will be spread across the faculty. Moving forward I can begin to reach out to departments letting them know and asking for their support in recruiting students. By the beginning of next term, the aim is to begin the process of interviewing those who applied to the role so that we can begin their contract term and start working with their faculties/ departments

I've also been involved in the planning and execution of Decolonise Workshops, managed by Tony Fawcett and Sam Nolan. The first one will be on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November; myself and Dan Taki, President of DPOCA, will be on a panel discussing the decolonising of our curriculum and what this means.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Sarah McAllister  
RE: Postgraduate Academic Officer Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## Update on priorities:

### **COVID-19 and Education**

Unsurprisingly, the biggest impact on the Postgraduates this year in light of the pandemic is the effect on teaching, research and community. Since August, I have 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 when we are in a rapidly changing environment. I have also collected feedback on the PG admission process and the experience of teaching in the first week of term. Since then, the feedback on teaching has been channelled into the Recovery groups, Education Committee and Research Degrees Committee. Furthermore, I have worked closely with Nailah to establish the SU's stance on how the University should respond if teaching moves completely online, which covers quality of teaching, assessment, guidance and communication, access to IT equipment, and community.

### **Interconnected PG Communities**

Alongside the impact on teaching and learning, Covid-19 has impacted our 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. Due to the limitations in face to face interactions, other student leaders and myself have been working on new ways to engage Postgraduate students in the Durham Postgraduate Community.

During Postgrad Freshers' Week, I hosted a Subject Meet and Greet to facilitate over 150 postgraduates meeting fellow students from their departments in breakout rooms on a zoom call, alongside being introduced to some of the student leaders from the Common Rooms and Associations. Furthermore, I organised some more causal social events, including drop-ins, a livestream tour of Durham and I have been working with the MCR Presidents and academic staff to help facilitate community building at the beginning of term.

### **Capturing the range of PG Experiences**

Often the Postgrad experience is split between the Postgraduate Taught (PGT) and the Postgraduate Research (PGR). This distinction, while necessary, often means that there are a number of problems ways in which Postgraduates are considered due to the University structure, thus sometimes PGTs are grouped with Undergrad courses, or the research undertaken by PhD students is grouped together with staff research. It is therefore necessary to have a more nuanced approach that captures the range of Postgraduate experiences and understands the current issues surrounding each area.

At the Postgraduate level, there is a diverse range of courses and degrees including PhD, MRes, MA, MBA, MSc, PGCE, Part Time, Distance Learners, International Students, Mature Students, Parents and Carers, etc. This year, I am planning on doing some research to identify the issues that exist within these different groups of Postgraduate students, so we can act accordingly with this information. This is particular import as all students are being affected by the pandemic in different ways, so highlighting best practice and weaknesses is paramount to uphold a high-quality Postgraduate experience.

As part of this priority, I have already started some work responding to areas that have already been identified. The problems surrounding the admission and enrolment process have been reported consistently for the last two years. Thus, the information we have from this year's survey and feedback from last year's PGT advisory board will therefore be used to highlight these issues to the University and lobby for changes to the current system and procedures. Furthermore, I have been representing the concerns of PGR Teaching Assistants over communication, safety, and online and face to face teaching.

## General updates:

- Filmed a Tour of the Library to demonstrate how it would work this term.
- 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.
- Interviewed candidates for our Faculty Rep Positions and helped to run the first training session.
- Provided the Office for Students with feedback on online learning.

**TO:** Assembly  
**FROM:** Ewan Swift  
**RE:** Welfare and Liberation Officer Report  
**DATE:** 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020

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## Update on priorities:

### Housing and Accommodation

My 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.

- Updated resources and coordinated with welfare officers and livers out reps for the “Take Time to Sign” housing campaign
- Contacted estate agents and landlords about plans for covid-19 safe house viewings
- Engaged in conversations around pushing the house signing period back, and the need for a student specific HMO licensing scheme
- Involved in the recruitment of the new Student Community Wardens

### Safety and Culture

My 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.

- Delivered Active Bystander training to around 550 freps for Induction Week and raised the need for this training to be fully funded and delivered to all students
- Involved in the recruitment of the new sexual misconduct and violence investigators
- Spoke to SSDP (Students for Sensible Drugs Policy) and the university regarding drugs education and changing the current zero tolerance drugs policy
- Held a Welfare Forum on “Tackling Sexual Misconduct and Violence at Durham University”

### Student Support

My 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.

- Pushed academic staff to take the university's online mental health training in preparation for the new academic year
- Provided feedback on the university's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Provided feedback on student support at Durham and sat on the Student Support Review Project Board
- Provided feedback on the self cert process and was involved in the online self cert form user testing

## General updates:

### Covid-19

As you can imagine, all the officers have spent lots of their time in meetings discussing Covid-19!

- Consulted with students to feed into the creation of the Covid-19 breach disciplinary procedures
- Reviewed the addition of a Covid-19 section to the student pledge
- Engaged in conversations with local residents around how to communicate local Covid-19 guidelines to livers out and ensure the whole community keeps safe
- Raised concerns surrounding access to GP and health services with the Claypath and University Medical Group
- Successfully pushed for rooms in the Palatinate Centre to be used as a private and confidential space for students to take calls when virtually accessing the Counselling and Disability support services
- Addressed concerns surrounding students returning to campus on BBC Radio Newcastle

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Seun Twins  
RE: President Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## Priorities Update:

### **A Commission on Culture**

This year, we have had ample opportunity to reflect on the state of our university and in conversation we always seem to end up talking about 'the Durham Culture'. We cannot deny that the dominant narrative of 'the Durham Culture' being portrayed in the media and discussed on campus currently is not one students can be proud of. This culture is toxic. This year my focus I am commissioning 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.

### **Aims of the Commission:**

- 1) to identify and locate positive and negative behaviours/attitudes in Durham- as it pertains to the student experience
- 2) to offer sustainable and long term recommendations to deconstruct and amend this culture.

### **How will it work?**

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 myself 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. This 'Culture Commission' thus appropriates a similar format to the Respect Commission, but is exclusively about the student experience and motivated by Culture rather than Respect. In order to make this commission as accessible as possible and directly capture the student voice, the survey, SU assembly, focus groups and commissioner updates will be central to this report.

## Covid Updates:

## General Updates:



- Recorded a speech for Matriculation
- Organised and attended Islamophobia Awareness and Antisemitism Training
- Had the first meeting for the Vice-Chancellor recruitment working group
- Wrote my first report for council
- Attended lots of meetings including Durham Area Action Partnership, Durham Residents Forum,
- Attended the first (and second) PresComm of the year
- Attended the first SU Rep meeting of the year
- Started an Officer Instagram Account (shamless plug for more followers)

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Anna Marshall  
RE: Opportunities Officer Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## Update on priorities:

**Sustainability** – 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. Planning to launch a reporting tool on the SU website to flag environmental concerns in specific areas across the University. Have met with ECO DU to support the production of a student-led environmental lobbying journal, which will be written by students but with my oversight to provide legal advice and policy suggestions. Planned relaunch of SDG Instagram, to continue my predecessor's fantastic work with a slightly more local lens.

**Bolstering community** – 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. Closely working with the University to ensure our student groups are able to operate with maximum effectiveness and safety during these pressing times, with a return of some active, media and art groups. I believe in the need to encourage quality face-to-face interactions, so that as far as possible students are being given opportunities to interact in a safe manner. Provisional plans are in place for all groups that need to meet to be able to do so by the end of term, should the risk become low enough. Attended meetings with Common Room presidents to try and keep in close communications during the first few weeks so any emergent issues can be addressed on a higher level. Continued my predecessors work on engaging Durham SU in wider regional activism, by joining the Tyne and Wear Citizens to focus on issues of climate change, mental health and tackling hate culture.

**Democracy** – This will be mentioned in a separate report at this meeting, but crucially started this job early to ensure we could catch the perspectives of outgoing 2020 students, then created a set of guidelines for how we wanted the democracy review to look. Have now recruited a paid researcher, and a group of students to help provide insight into this research process throughout.

## General updates:

**Communications and transparency:** Written four detailed articles on the SU website on [the success of fresher's fair](#), the [return to face-to-face activity](#), the [situation with Palatinate](#) and [the democracy review](#). Provided weekly updates on my role via Facebook 'Anna Marshall SU' and twitter @DurhamSUOpps. Did a tour of Durham and an advice Q&A for the Fresher's Instagram channel. Released video responses as part of the officer team to emergent issues, and agreed to interviews with [EdVoy](#) and Palatinate when requested. Only declined to give comment to Daily Mail.

**Student Group De-Registration:** We received evidence of conversations which threatened campus tolerance on many levels. These conversations encouraged violence whilst mocking minority groups in a highly vicious manner. This demonstrated a level of toxicity which permeated into the very culture of two Durham SU groups. Students which align themselves with the original intentions of these groups have a right to not be exposed to such abhorrent behaviour, so we took the decision to deregister these groups. I have asked the Opportunities staff team to conduct an impartial listening exercise with members of these two groups, and then we are hoping to re-establish both groups under new leadership with safer protocols to ensure that students with Free Market or Conservative values are able to be represented fairly and safely.

**Palatinate:** Once students mostly left Durham in March, the printing of *Palatinate* was suspended and many of you will have seen the regular news updates which *Palatinate* provided online. Indeed, the months of March, April and September this year saw them receive a huge rise in website hits. However, Durham SU is operating with a reduced budget this year, and has had to cut spending in many areas. With this in mind, we could not reasonably prioritise money into a print newspaper which faced so many barriers to distribution, whilst its office was closed and colleges were restricting movement. We are continuing to support *Palatinate* digitally but have encouraged *Palatinate* to secure either advertising revenues or donations in order to continue with their print newspaper, which in recent years has cost the SU between £10,000 and £18,000 per year. They have received enough donations to print issues for the rest of this term, and we have purchased the software needed for them to do this remotely.

**Training:** I spent much of Summer attending training on the multifaceted nature of this role. This included a week with NUS Lead and Change Conference, but also adjusting to the various committees and powers which sabbatical officers have.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: \*JCR President's Committee\*  
RE: Sub-committee Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## Update on priorities:

- Student safety and settling during Covid-19.
- Push for greater representation within the university/a structure that reflects the importance of the role of CRs in the experience at a collegiate university.
- Collaborating to safely re-open college bars, gyms, libraries etc.
- Facilitating return to college sport.
- Adapting other college and JCR operations to be Covid secure.

## General updates:

- Fresher's week completed fairly successfully.
- Big focus now on maintaining college communities.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Jack Simmonds, MCR Presidents' Committee Chair  
RE: Sub-committee Report  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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## General updates:

### **Fresher's Week**

We spent time over the summer discussing how to keep up engagement during Fresher's week this year, focussing on COVID restrictions. We worked collaboratively to create an Inter-MCR online pub quiz, which had great attendance and allowed students to socialise with other PGs outside of their course and households. To maintain these alternative social links, we are planning to continue with these events monthly. We also attended events hosted by Sarah McAllister, the SU PG Academic Rep, and introduced ourselves, our colleges and where to access our respective common room pages.

### **MCR Representation**

Over the summer, we have been attending several committee groups, including newly formed groups related to COVID. Since starting this year, we have elected a new committee chair and have representatives attending committees we have recently been given membership to. The committee chair has also met with the JCR Presidents' Committee chair and the SU Officers to discuss wider representation of common rooms.

TO: Assembly  
FROM: Seun Twins  
RE: Amendment to **Standing Order D**  
DATE: 29 October 2020

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There is currently no authority for Assembly to meet online in contrast to the proceedings of the trustees where authorisation is granted by the Articles (see Article 75). This is important because, for example, Article 75 requires simultaneous communication because charity law is clear that one person being frozen out of an online call for connectivity reasons may invalidate any resolution of the trustees: how does this apply to any resolution passed in a meeting of ~60 people? If a single person is frozen out of Assembly, is a resolution valid?

The usual process for creating Standing Orders, as Article 57, is that Assembly and the trustees will agree a text together. Assembly is not able to meet online to propose a Standing Order which would authorise it to meet online, so the trustees have resolved a Standing Order as below. There seem to be few other options to expressly create a power for Assembly to meet online.

Assembly is invited to ratify the proposed amendment to Standing Order D.

#### Appendix A: Proposed Amendment to Standing Order D

A meeting of Assembly may be held either in person or by teleconference or by another other suitable electronic means agreed by the trustees in which all participants may communicate simultaneously with all other participants.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Anna Marshall

**RE: Assembly Democracy Review Update**

DATE: 29 October 2020

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We are undertaking a democracy review to interrogate, reform and change our 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.

## Context

- I believe students were clear at the end of last years' election that they wanted students to have broader and more transparent access to shaping our democratic rules and structures. If we rush this, we risk not being able to consult with students sufficiently and fairly, especially given the broad and ranging challenges and demands on their time students, and particularly student leaders are facing as a result of a global pandemic.
- I have been holding regular open meetings which any students who are able to attend (we've had a moving cast of about 40, thank you to all those who have come at various times) to act as a steering group for this work. This group has had a variety of different, and some contrasting, opinions (reflecting those within the broader student community) and members of the group have told me they think it's important that we do seek that broad student input into this work beyond just assembly members and student leaders.
- The position taken by [Durham SU's Assembly](#) at the end of last year that "Durham has a deep-rooted problem with systemic racism and hegemony" and that Assembly would adopt a "position of active anti-racism and commit ourselves to tackling racism and oppression". We know that this means tackling our own ways of doing things, as those outside of the SU, and recognize that our democratic structures and spaces are not an exception to these experiences and biases. This is born out in what we have heard from students about their experiences in spaces like assembly or in elections.

Some of the short-term changes which individuals have suggested implementing immediately are being delayed until the democracy review has been completed, in order to avoid spending too much time on changes which will only have limited effectiveness. Some changes are necessary, such as those which will need to be made to the election process so that a more stable election can be conducted in February. The focus of this Democracy Review is on making permanent change, so as far as possible I see this as separate to making more minor changes, as current processes will hopefully become obsolete in a few months. A timeline of the democracy review process up to this point is available [here](#) but fundamentally it will next consist of three parts.

**Part 1** (Michaelmas 2020): Intensive and broad qualitative and quantitative research to understand a diverse perspective of student views on the purposes and priorities of democracy and democratic functions. This is firstly a mass survey, to try and gauge the opinion of as broad a sample as possible, and then the researchers will hold focus groups to

tease out answers to any issues the survey may point out. We're recruiting 10 brand ambassadors, who will be helping us to engage with a broader demography, and also a student researcher to assist with this work, who will be ensuring the research is delivered with enough contextual awareness of Durham. This research will primarily be collated by a professional contractor external to the SU. Core student representatives of the steering group are meeting fortnightly throughout the process to deliver feedback and flag any emergent concerns.

**Part 2** (Epiphany 2021): Development, with students, of models based on the insights of that research. These models must be feasible for the charity from a legal and governance perspective whilst recognising the key areas students want prioritized within their democracy. These models will then be taken to further student consultation so a final preference can be agreed. A special committee will be created within the Durham SU's board structures to coordinate this, which I will update you on further at the next meeting of Assembly.

**Part 3** (Summer 2021): The new model will need to be agreed by the University Secretary, Durham SU Board of Trustees and via a campus referendum before it can be implemented.



TO: Assembly

FROM: Seun Twins & DCU

RE: Amendment to **Equality & Diversity: Core SU Position**

DATE: 29 October 2020

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

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 groups<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

All practices or behaviours which directly, or indirectly, result in discrimination, injustice or social exclusion should be challenged and dismantled. Equality and diversity should be embedded in decision making, practice and activity across the University community. The struggle for liberation, inclusion and social change should be built upon effective, organised activism and the dismantling of systematic injustice. The Union should continue to campaign, lobby and support liberation work as well as offer representative functions for under-represented groups. Durham University should actively prioritise and platform a diverse range of student voices who represent the wide spectrum of student needs and interests. In addition, the University should commit to thorough consultation with the appropriate student leaders and representatives. Ultimately, liberation and inclusion should be embedded throughout the work of the Union (including all SU student groups) and any behaviours which do not support or further this goal should be condemned by the Union.

A better future is one where all students feel happy, safe and protected - resulting in a University experience they can take pride in.

### **The barriers:**

Whilst the Durham community is made up of a range of diverse individuals, the Durham culture and environment tends to privilege white, cisgender, heterosexual males from middle-upper class backgrounds with no disability. This privilege reinforces a negative culture of exclusion and marginalisation which is experienced by under-represented groups who are unjustly faced with abuse and violence

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to individuals or groups who have experienced discrimination based on their race, gender, gender identity, sexuality, class or background, nationality, age, religion, (dis)ability, ethnicity, care leavers, estranged students, student carers, student parents, relationships or any other element or intersection of their identity.

As Durham strives for diversification, decolonisation, digitisation, internationalisation and expansion, the lack of specialised support services presents an additional obstacle to equality, diversity and inclusion.

**Belief about the change and the responsibilities:**

The position of Durham Students' Union is:

*That*, Durham SU will actively condemn any behaviours, languages and beliefs which further victimise underrepresented groups.

*That* Durham SU will commit to the long-term pursuit of recognising, challenging and dismantling the dominant culture of hate existent within our community.

*That*, in the short term, Durham SU should promote a whole-University approach to mitigate the effects of oppression, disadvantage and discrimination.

*That*, in the long term, Durham SU should promote a whole-University approach to dismantle the existing structural inequalities and injustices which systematically oppress minority groups, to ensure that Durham is an inclusive, diverse and equal institution and city.