

Council
09 July 2019
Sponsor: George Walker

Author: George Walker

Durham SU Report
Proposed Resolution

Council is asked to note the contents of this report.

Communication Status: Paper	Open	x	Open Internal		Confidential Restricted/External	
Communication Status: Appendices	Open		Open Internal		Confidential Restricted/External	
Freedom of Information Exemption	Paper:					
	Appendices:					

Previous Consideration by this or other Committee

N/A

Further Committee approval required

N/A

Appendices

None

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 As the President of Durham SU, I present this report, which addresses:
- Priorities for Durham students.
 - Strategic student sector development, for Council's consideration.
 - Developments within Durham SU.

2. Priorities for Durham students
2.1 University Growth & VC Town Hall

Throughout this year, Durham SU Officers have heard a significant and growing number of concerns from students, and student leaders, regarding the University's planned growth in student numbers. As outlined in my report to May's Council meeting, the Vice Chancellor attended a Town Hall meeting on 14th June and fielded a broad range of questions from students.

The event demonstrated a level of interest from students in the development and implementation of the University Strategy, as well as the need for better student-facing communication and consultation on strategic developments. Follow-up conversations with the Vice Chancellor have led to the suggestion that similar events are held during the next academic year, with the UEC leads for different areas of the University Strategy taking part in

sessions with students. Such events would be welcomed by Durham SU and we look forward to developing these as we move into the new academic year.

2.2 Access & Participation Plan

The SU has worked with the University to provide feedback, and to feed in, to the University's access and participation plan. Throughout our contribution, we've highlighted seven areas of focus which we believe are a priority if we're to effectively tackle the very real barriers to participation at Durham. These are;

- Increasing BAME student numbers
- Continued focus on local students
- Specific support guarantees
- More specific cross-referencing of data to identify disadvantage
- Disaggregating disabled students group
- Student Financial Support
- Embedded Leadership on Culture Change

We do think that engagement and consultation with SU representatives in the plan has been broadly positive and particularly welcomed the opportunity to meet with Chris Millward, Director for Fair Access and Participation at the Office for Students. However, the process engaged a relatively small number of students beyond this. We believe that for future plans to move towards genuine co-creation, this work should be expanded earlier and more deliberately in the planning process. A greater number of informal mechanisms for soliciting feedback from specific interest groups and students in generality, in addition to wider dissemination of ongoing developments regarding the plan, would in particular be welcomed. This would better allow areas of interest or opportunity identified by student leaders and members of the executive to be properly expanded and developed through a range of feedback mechanisms with a diverse student base.

2.3 Student Housing

At Durham SU we have highlighted issues around student housing as a key priority for Durham students. This year, our Welfare & Liberation Officer has been researching students' experiences of housing in Durham so that we can build a collective vision of how we can tackle problems in the private rental sector. Following the publication of our [short report](#) on student housing in Durham, our Welfare & Liberation Officer met with the Vice Chancellor and the Interim Pro-Vice Chancellor (Colleges & Wider Student Experience) to discuss the findings. A further meeting is now planned to take place with Durham SU Officers, the Vice Chancellor and the Chief Executive of Durham County Council to discuss the regulation and market for student housing in Durham.

2.4 Lecture Capture

Over a number of years, Durham SU Officers have called upon the University to introduce lecture capture, to enhance academic study, in particular making it more inclusive and accessible for students with disabilities and students for whom English is not their first language. We were pleased that this year, the University introduced the ENCORE lecture capture system.

A report to University Senate on 18 June presented significant evidence that students had benefitted from the introduction of lecture capture, and that its use among the student body has been widespread. I was delighted that following representations from Durham SU Officers, Senate approved the proposed resolutions, meaning that the University will continue to use

lecture capture on an opt-out basis, with lecturers wishing to opt-out being required to seek approval from their Head of Department.

It will be vital that the University creates clear and robust opt-out criteria and that the agreed policy is implemented in full by all Heads of Departments, with oversight from the Lecture Capture Steering Group. The University must also make the necessary assurances to staff about the use of lecture capture to undermine industrial action and in performance management processes, including inserting into the policy legally drafted text on use in industrial action. Too many students are still unable to access lecture capture, and we hope that Council will approve the new policy and support further efforts to increase its availability to those studying at Durham.

2.5 Student Finance Gap & Value for Money

A major area of the work this year for Durham SU has been researching the cost of the Durham student experience. We recently published an [analysis of the student 'Funding Gap'](#) for presentation at the University's Financial Awards Committee, highlighting the difference between students' income and the cost of being a student at Durham. The report demonstrates the need for the University to either widen the accessibility of additional support funds (particularly to reach students from mid-income families), or reduce the cost of attendance by revising the cost of college accommodation and participating in the wider student experience.

On 20th June, Durham SU's Assembly approved a [core position](#) 'Value for Money' (VfM), which seeks to create a student definition of VfM. The position departs from the University's own VfM statement, with greater emphasis placed on the importance of the student experience and student voice in defining value. I hope that through the University's VfM Committee, we will be able to incorporate key elements of the student definition into the University's work in this area.

2.6 Durham SU Community Strategy

One of my key priorities as Durham SU President has been the development of a Community Engagement Strategy. I am now pleased to inform Council that following conversations with our partners in the local community and across the sector over the last year, a Community Engagement Strategy has now been approved by Durham SU's Trustee Board.

[The Strategy](#) outlines the context for Durham SU's external-facing work, four key themes which provide the focus and goals of the strategy and our intended actions towards these goals for 2019/20.

2.7 Naming of South College

At Durham students consider our colleges as our homes. Colleges are shaped by the efforts and successes of students. They are shared communities created by students and staff: our ownership of our college experience is what makes Durham unique. Durham SU previously made clear through our 'College McCollegeface' campaign that we believe the student community should be leading the discussion on the naming of new colleges.

On 20th June, Durham SU Assembly passed a motion confirming Mo Mowlam as the preferred name for South College. It builds on a policy by our previous President Megan Croll, which created a short-list of 5 individuals (including Mo Mowlam) and which recognised that with 13 of our current 16 colleges named after men, we need more diversity in the naming of future colleges, if we're going to promote the kind of Durham we want future students to aspire to.

With the imminent creation of more Colleges and a need to name these communities, it would be welcome if Council could consider more concrete deadlines for naming these permanently, with consideration of the need for students to be co-creators of these collegiate communities.

3. Strategic student sector development

3.1 Augar Report

Council will today receive a presentation from the Vice Chancellor on the recent publication of the Augar Review into post-18 Education funding. Some recommendations included in the report are of particular interest to Durham students.

Council should note that with regard to student accommodation, Augar makes the recommendation that *'The OfS should examine the cost of student accommodation more closely and work with students and providers to improve the quality and consistency of data about costs, rents, profits and quality'*. Given the concerns expressed over a number of years about the price and relative quality of college accommodation at Durham, the University can expect to receive scrutiny on this issue. This makes it even more essential that the work being undertaken by the University Finance Department to determine the true cost of college accommodation and to provide greater transparency to students, is progressed as a matter of urgency. Council may also wish to note the significant [action already taken by institutions such as the University of Liverpool](#), to provide more affordable student accommodation.

Whilst the recommendation made to re-introduce maintenance grants is wholeheartedly welcomed, we were concerned to note the recommendation made by the panel to withdraw funding for Foundation Years which are linked to Degree programmes. The provision of Foundation Years is a key tool in meeting the challenges of Widening Participation and raising the attainment of those from under-privileged backgrounds, and one that the University plans to utilise in its latest Access & Participation Plan. I hope that the University will clearly re-affirm its commitment to the provision of Foundation Programmes in light of this recommendation, and will make representations to government to continue funding for these.

4. Developments within Durham SU

4.1 Quality Students' Unions

As previously reported to Council, Durham SU has undertaken the Quality Students' Unions accreditation programme, which was developed by NUS with funding from HEFCE, and is endorsed by the Committee of University Chairs, Universities UK, Guild HE, and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

I am now incredibly proud to announce the outcome of the March 2019 Quality Students' Union assessment. The programme asked for a self-assessment and supporting evidence against 12 areas of organisational effectiveness. A review team from Lancaster SU and Sheffield SU then tested this evidence in an on-site visit and provided the outcomes report in June. The verifiers validated our self-assessments against the available ratings (no evidence/not assessed, good, very, good, excellent). A moderation panel (UUK, NCVO, and other partners who help NUS critically appraise each review report) have confirmed the outcomes.

The Durham SU Strategy commits to achieving a 'good' award by 2022. An early submission was advised and agreed on the understanding that a three-year renewal period would give us the opportunity to gain an award, with recommendations for improvement, and then a re-accreditation attempt could be made in 2022. The outcomes were agreed at:

- Strategic planning: **Excellent**
- Relationships and Partnerships: **Very Good**
- Governance: **Very Good (with elements of Excellent)**
- Democracy: **Very Good**
- People: **Very Good**

- Communication: **Very Good**
- Services: **Very Good**
- Participation: **Very Good**
- Representation and Campaigning: **Excellent**
- Review and Evaluation: **Very Good**
- Context: **Very Good**
- Impact: **Very Good**

In summary: **Durham SU has been recognised as a Very Good students' union.**

The Durham SU President, Chief Executive and the incoming Pro-Vice Chancellor for Colleges & the Wider Student Experience will receive the award at a Parliamentary reception on 18th July.

4.2 Appointments UEC Boards

Durham SU's Assembly meeting on 20th June approved the appointment of a student representative to both the Provost Board and the Operations Board. I am now able to confirm that the President will serve as a member of the Operations Board, with the Undergraduate Academic Officer serving on the Provost Board. We look forward to working with the University to providing induction and ongoing support for the Officers serving as members of the new UEC Boards, ensuring a powerful student voice within their work.

4.3 Durham SU Annual Awards

Durham SU were delighted to hold our Annual Awards ceremony at the Radisson Blu Hotel on 17th June, celebrating the incredible achievements of Durham students and staff over the past year. [Student and staff winners](#) were announced across a range of categories, and we were pleased to be joined by senior colleagues from both the University and wider community.

4.4 Hate Crime Reporting

Durham SU staff and volunteers are taking part in training sessions with Durham Police on Hate Crime reporting. This will allow Durham SU to register as a hate crime reporting centre, with the service being promoted in the new academic year.