

TO: Assembly

FROM: Emily Jolliffe

RE: Cut the Rent

DATE: 26 November 2020

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### **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.<sup>1</sup>
  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.<sup>2</sup>
  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.<sup>3</sup>

### **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.

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<sup>1</sup> This is based on SU research on the Funding Gap and Cost of Attendance.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/about/DurhamUniversityMasterplanExecutiveSummaryRevCSML.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1s6x8AWbRg43zSMHV-6UCqifyA0Zl8Houdn8JfBWv4fveJG5kBzWa\\_nEM](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](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_nkRJ6TiojT3hz9uL57Ip5PqehW8ONBH/view?usp=sharing)