

DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

There will be a meeting of Assembly at 1800 on Thursday, 9 February, The Learning Lounge (C05a), Dunelm House

Please try and arrive at the meeting from 1745, for a prompt start at 1800.

AGENDA

1. OPENING OF MEETING (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES)

To receive apologies, conflicts of interest, and notification of any other urgent business not on the agenda.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS ON 8 DECEMBER 2022 (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2223/19

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

Routine business items

3. ASSEMBLY PROCEDURES COMMITTEE ELECTION (CHAIR, 10 MINUTES) UA/2223/20

To vote on electing members to the Assembly Procedures Committee, a committee of Assembly.

4. TRUSTEE APPOINTMENT (CHIEF EXECUTIVE, 5 MINUTES) UA/2223/25

To ratify the appointment of a new lay trustee to the Durham SU Board of Trustees,

5. OFFICER UPDATES (OFFICERS, 10 MINUTES) UA/2223/21

To receive an update on team priorities from the SU officer team.

6. COMMITTEE UPDATES (COMMITTEE CHAIRS, 10 MINUTES)

To receive updates from committee chairs on activities since the last meeting.

7. ASSOCIATION UPDATES (ASSOCIATION CHAIRS, 10 MINUTES)

To receive updates from association chairs on activities since the last meeting.

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

Items for discussion:

8. NUS ANTISEMITISM REPORT UPDATE (PRESIDENT, 10 MINUTES) UA/2223/22

To receive an update on the NUS antisemitism report and what it means for Durham SU.

9. NUS POLICY 2023: HOUSING (FRANKIE TRESS-WHEATLEY 15 MINUTES) UA/2223/23

To approve the NUS Policy submission for 2023 National Conference.

10. DURHAM UNIVERSITY ACCOMMODATION FEES DISCUSSION (PRESIDENT, 30 MINUTES) UA/2223/24

To discuss how college accommodation be made cheaper and if there are aspects of college provision that could or should be cut to reduce the cost to students and resolve to set up a task and finish group.

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 before the meeting to make arrangements.

DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING 8 December 2022

Fonteyn Ballroom, Dunelm House

1. OPENING OF MEETING

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

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS ON 3 NOVEMBER 2022 AND MATTERS ARISING

There were no amendments to minutes of the last meetings.
Minutes from the last meetings were approved.

JC noted his objection to the voting records of Assembly members not being included in the minutes.

3. RATIFICATION OF STUDENT GROUPS

NOTED: the new ratified student groups from Student Group Committee.

Routine business items

4. BOARD REPORT

NOTED: an update report from the Board of Trustees and **RATIFIED** Peter Robertson as Returning Officer.

5. RETURNING OFFICER ELECTION REPORTS

NOTED: the returning officer's reports from NUS delegate and Assembly membership elections.

6. ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ELECTIONS

NOTED: an update on electing members to the committees of Assembly.

Gareth Hughes provided an update on elections for Assembly committees and said that no nominations had been received so far for either committee and explained that the committees were a new part of the standing orders voted for by Assembly members and encouraged members to nominate themselves.

7. OFFICER UPDATES

NOTED: updates from the SU Officer Team on their priorities for the year. Updates were provided by:

Joe McGarry, SU President
Josh Freestone, Undergraduate Academic Officer
Laura Curran, Welfare and Liberation Officer
Jack Ballingham, Opportunities Officer

8. COMMITTEE UPDATES

NOTED: updates from Committees:

Student Groups Committee

JCR PresComm
Academic Affairs Committee (written report)
MCR PresComm
SU Rep Committee

Apologies: DUCK

Assembly Procedures Committee and Officer Scrutiny Committee members have not yet been elected, so no update was provided.

9. ASSOCIATION UPDATES

NOTED: updates from Associations:

Students with Disabilities Association (SwDA)
International, Students' Association

Apologies: LGBT+ Association, Durham People of Colour Association (DPoCA), Women's Association, Trans Association, Working Class Students' Association, Mature Students' Association (MATSA)

****ACCESS BREAK****

Items for discussion:

10. DURHAM SU POSITION ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

PASSED: a motion on Durham SU's position on nuclear weapons.

JB presented the motion and said that he is the Chair of Durham University Nuclear Disarmament. Durham University should not have continued to have a partnership, research, and careers advertising arrangements with, including receiving funding from, the Atomic Weapons Establishment and nuclear submarine and weapons manufacturing and maintenance companies.

TM spoke against the motion and said that after speaking to the engineering society and discussing job opportunities relating to the industry, which can include companies that use aerodynamics, this will mean fewer opportunities for students in this area and less chance to gain experience in the field. There are already not a lot of science students choosing not to stay within the field, so this would mean a further reduction and fewer companies coming to Durham to hold events to draw in graduates.

AK moves to a vote.

The motion passes.

11. DURHAM SU CODE OF CONDUCT

APPROVED: the proposed Code of Conduct for Durham Students' Union members.

JB introduced the Code and explained why this was being developed, what this would mean for SU members, and how the process would work.

There were no speeches for the motion.

There were no speeches against the motion

SS said that the policy could be more inclusive, and it would be good if this could be looked at and amended further down the line.

AK moves to a vote.

The motion passes.

12. PALATINATE UPDATE

NOTED: an update on recent developments with Palatinate.

JB presented an update for Assembly members on the current situation with Palatinate and the timeline of what has been happening up until this point, details of the independence proposal, and the next steps for moving forward.

Nicole Wu from Palatinate also spoke as part of the update.

There was no other business.

Voting Record of Assembly Members

	Nuclear Weapons Position	Code of Conduct
MCR Prescomm Chair	Against	For
UG Academic Officer	For	For
President	Abstain	For
Students with Disabilities Association	Against	For
International Student's Association	Abstain	For
Open Place Rep	For	For
JCR Prescomm	For	For
Stephenson College Rep	Against	For
University College Rep	For	For
St Mary's College Rep	For	For
Open Place Rep	For	For
Open Place Rep	Abstain	For
Hatfield College Rep	Against	For
Student Group Committee Chair	Against	For
Hild and Bede College Rep	For	For
UG Science Rep	Against	For
John Snow College Rep	For	For
Opportunities Officer	For	For
St John's College Rep	Against	For
St Cuthbert's Society Rep	For	For
UG Arts and Humanities Rep	For	For
Welfare and Liberation Officer	For	For

TO: Assembly

FROM: Assembly Chair

RE: Assembly Procedures Committee Election

DATE: 9 February 2023

Assembly Procedures Committee

X4 places available to any Assembly member

Each candidate will be given 2 minutes in the meeting to hust before members vote.

Nominations:

Jon Chan

Manifesto:

Having served on the Assembly for the second year, I have been dedicated in facilitating the democratic process within the SU institution. For instance, I have pushed for recording and publishing members' voting records, also taking an active part in the democratic review debate. I believe with my experience can enable proceedings in the assembly to be more transparent, efficient, and more importantly, democratic.

Toby Saunders

Manifesto:

Hi, I'm Toby Saunders and I'm running for the Assembly Procedures Committee. I'm a third-year English student. Over the past three years, I've embraced the college experience as part of the Ball, Welfare and Environment committee. I have also been involved in five college sports and have attended many college events. I will bring this enthusiasm to the Procedures Committee to ensure that motions follow due process. I am confident that I can help to maximise participation in Assembly through promoting a culture of respectful debate and accessibility as laid out in the DSU's Standing Orders. The SU can do better when it comes to arranging dates for Assembly and explaining to members the policy procedures, the mechanism of emergency motions and behaviours allowed during discussions. I will work towards these ends to make the Procedures Committee transparent and efficient so that the SU functions more democratically.

Theo Stubbs

Manifesto:

Having thoroughly enjoyed my time getting involved with the SU & SGC for the past year or so, and being on the Assembly this academic year, I feel that I want to dedicate more of my time to the running of the Assembly. I have both the passion and time to properly carry out the role that the APC requires of me, so I would greatly appreciate your support.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Board of Trustees
RE: Trustee Appointment
DATE: 9 February 2023

Trustee Appointment

Assembly is asked to ratify the appointment of a new lay trustee to the Durham SU Board of Trustees, in line with Article 51 of the Durham SU governing document.

A panel of four current trustees met to interview candidates on 20 January 2023: Clare Powne (lay trustee) chaired the panel, with Dhillon Shenoy (student trustee), Jack Ballingham (Opportunities Officer), Joe McGarry (President).

Recommendation

The trustees unanimously recommend that Assembly ratify the appointment of Rachel Taylor:

Rachel is Director of Housing and Corporate Services at South Tyneside Homes. She has extensive strategic and operational experience, in executive and non-executive roles, including as Finance Director at four large housing groups and Head of Finance at a further education college. Rachel is a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, and Chair of a local primary school.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Jack Ballingham

RE: Opportunities Officer Report

DATE: 9 February 2023

Student Group Activity

As of the end of January, Durham SU had 291 registered student groups, between which there are 26,191 memberships. Student groups have, since the beginning of the academic year, hosted 721 events through Durham SU's processes (the actual number of events will be higher than this). The chair of Student Groups Committee will be able to provide more information on registration of new groups, and student group finances.

Refreshers' Fair

The annual Refreshers' Fair returned this year, on the 25th January. The Fair is an opportunity to showcase and promote many of our student groups and societies, outside of the usual period of freshers' week. This year's was a great success, with 110 different stalls and several hundred visitors.

Housing Market Research Project

The research project into how the SU could take a direct role in the housing market, which was detailed in my December report, has been continuing this term. So far we have met with Lincoln and Bristol SUs' letting agencies, and staff from Student Co-op Homes, and discussed how their models have worked so far. Along with some other interviews we'll hopefully be conducting in the next few weeks, summaries and transcripts of these will be published for student consultation.

Following submissions from students and other campus stakeholders, a full document of the research will be published towards the end of the year – this will outline how each possible model works, and prospects for using them at Durham in the future.

Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill

As detailed elsewhere, the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill was amended by the House of Lords in December to remove Clause 4. This was the section that created the proposed "statutory tort" which gave individuals legal rights to sue students' unions. The amendment came after lobbying by Durham SU and students, and will be considered by the House of Commons soon. It remains to be seen whether the government will try to re-introduce Clause 4 into the Bill, and I will be working with MPs again through this process to argue that the amendment should be kept in the Bill.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Joe McGarry (President)

RE: NUS Antisemitism Report: What is it and what does it mean for Durham SU?

DATE: 9 February 2023

"I've read the recent report into antisemitism in the NUS, and the report is quite frankly damning. There's clearly been a failure in NUS to take antisemitism seriously and to listen to the voice of Jewish Students. I'm pleased we now have the report as it's something we can use to hold NUS to account with, and we'll be keeping a close eye on the implementation of the recommendations it makes. A national representative body for students is something that can have the power to achieve so much through lobbying on issues affecting Durham Students as part of the wider student community in the UK, and is part of the fabric of higher education in the UK. Just like we continue to challenge discrimination and racism within Durham SU and Durham University, the officers have a responsibility to challenge and this within NUS. In addition to working to change NUS we can use this report as a chance to reflect inwardly on what we do at Durham SU. Just "not being exclusive" isn't enough – we need to be actively inclusive, need to continue and expand our work with UJS on training for officers and staff, and need to continue to work to challenge racism and discrimination in higher education. I've spoken to our JSoc, and will continue to do so, and I'd strongly encourage anyone with thoughts to come and discuss these issues with me, so we can best support Durham students in changing oppressive culture in our union, our university, and the UK."

TO: Assembly

FROM: Durham SU

RE: NUS Antisemitism Report: What is it and what does it mean for Durham SU?

DATE: 9 February 2023

What is the report?

It's an independent investigation into allegations of antisemitism within NUS as an organisation. It was called in 2022, following a series of events surrounding NUS' 2022 National Conference and the election of the (now-dismissed) NUS President. The investigation into the NUS President was conducted first, leading to their dismissal in late 2022.

The investigation into NUS as an organisation explores experiences from the last 10 years. The report details numerous occasions when NUS has failed to identify, investigate, take action against and tackle antisemitism, both internally and within the student movement.

The report makes multiple recommendations to tackle the issue of antisemitism, including for NUS to create educational materials to provide example dialogue and good practice around the Israel/Palestine debate within the student movement, the Anti-Racist Anti-Fascist Committee to be revived, and a due diligence process to be created for election candidates to demonstrate a commitment to anti-racism. You can read the full report and recommendations [here](#).

How has NUS responded?

NUS has acknowledged the findings of the investigation and apologised to Jewish students. They recognise that the way discussions around Palestine/Israel happen within NUS and student politics need to change, in order for Jewish students to feel genuinely welcomed.

They've developed an action plan which commits to understanding and tackling antisemitism in all its forms. They will set up an advisory board to oversee the implementation of the recommendations from this report. They will develop educational resources, make use of external facilitators for discussions around Palestine/Israel and continue to undertake antisemitism training both for students and staff. They will include Jewish representation within a wider strategy of inclusion and liberation, and strengthen their candidate preparation process for NUS elections, among other things. You can read the full action plan [here](#).

What does this mean for Durham SU and Durham students?

As a Students' Union, it's our responsibility to join work that combats racism and discrimination, and we will work with other students' unions to change NUS for the better. Through NUS, as a result of this report, antisemitism training and educational materials will be available to SUs. Facilitators will be available to support a productive dialogue on the Palestine/Israel debate on local campuses, as well as nationally through NUS. It's our responsibility to make our campuses a good place for Jewish students to be, and while the release of the report itself won't fix the culture, it gives us confidence that NUS can and does want to change.

It also gives us the opportunity to reflect more purposefully on the culture at Durham University for Jewish students. Joe is working closely with our Jewish Students Association to respond to the report in full, and create meaningful change at Durham through working in partnership.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Frankie Tress-Wheatley
RE: NUS Policy: Housing
DATE: 9 February 2023

Title: Reckless recruitment, ridiculous rents, and rats: Universities must take more responsibility

Area: Housing

Expanded Submission (700 words)

Student housing across the UK is in crisis. There is an urgent need not only to examine the cost of housing, but also the quality, while also throwing light on universities' reckless recruitment policies. As the biggest student accommodation providers, Universities need to start taking responsibility for setting affordable accommodation prices, recruiting appropriate student numbers, and providing quality accommodation.

[Research by Save the Student](#) shows that in 2021/22 the average maintenance loan is around £5820 a year, while the [Unipol Accommodation Costs Survey 2021](#) found that in the same year the weighted average annual rent across the UK was £7374. [Cushman and Wakefield's overview](#) of the UK student accommodation market 2021/22 demonstrates both the alarming continuing trend of rapid growth in UK universities – with 24 UK institutions growing by 5000 or more students in the last five years – but also a continued slowdown in additional housing being built, and the shocking statistic that the average university accommodation cost was 73% of the maximum student loan available.

It is no surprise that in the [Student Money Survey 2022](#), 82% of student respondents said they worried about making ends meet. With a shortfall, on average, of £1500 just in terms of housing, and a government showing little sign of making any real moves to help students with the recent announcement of a far below retail price index (RPI) [rise in the maintenance loan](#), there are likely to be direct implications for students in the near future. Many are at risk of a seriously reduced quality of life and an increased risk of dropping out; 52% of respondents to the Student Money Survey said that they'd considered dropping out because of financial concerns.

While students continue to pay huge and growing sums for housing, quality is questionable in much both the private sector and university-managed accommodation, but reliable data is hard to come by, partly due to a lack of transparency from universities about what their housing stock is really like beyond the marketing photos for their website. This means that institutions are able to get away with poor maintenance standards, and the private sector in towns and cities which also house students likewise have little push to improve.

There is also little recourse for students who have issues with the quality of their student accommodation, both private and university-run, with no single ombudsman scheme to pursue issues, and usually little chance that disputes will be resolved in the relatively short time before leaving that property, if at all.

Government proposals for [a fairer private rented sector](#), presented in August 2022, proposed several things which we believe would be helpful for students in the housing market, but which in some cases did not go far enough. For instance, the proposed new ombudsman would be welcome, as would a new [Decent Homes Standard](#) (DHS) for the private rented sector to drive improvements in quality. However, there is clearly scope to improve protections specifically for students, and to extend concepts such as the ones proposed to university-run accommodation to ensure that no student in the UK lives in poor housing.

We believe there are five main things that NUS can, and should, do to address the issues identified:

1. Campaign for rent controls across university-owned accommodation in the UK, connected to the UK maintenance loan level at the time
2. Campaign for a link between student numbers at a university and the housing available in the local area in the interests of both students and local residents
3. Campaign for a Decent Student Homes Standard which would apply to both university-owned and private rented student accommodation
4. Campaign for the creation of a Student Housing Ombudsman to resolve disputes between students and their landlords
5. Campaign for greater transparency across housing in UK higher education in general, and in particular for:
 - a. Universities to publish an audit of their student housing every three years
 - b. Universities to publish their student recruitment numbers as soon as possible

Impact assessment

What's the issue and how does it affect students? (100 words):

UK student housing is increasingly expensive and of poor quality, used by institutions to pad their finances and landlords to grow their portfolios at the expense of student quality of life, disposable incomes and even their education. Student rents have already passed maintenance loan averages across the UK, and this is highly likely to push some students out of education altogether, while burdening others with debt.

Student housing quality, and difficulties in addressing it with landlords and universities also pose risks to both students' health and their experience of university.

What changes would we like to see in society to change this? (100 words):

We would like student housing to be taken more seriously by society at large, the government, landlords and universities, where in many cases it has been at best an afterthought for far too long.

A society that truly cares about student housing – both cost and quality – would also be one which looks to drive quality improvements across the housing sector in general, and to ensure that no one, student or otherwise, lives in overpriced, poorly-maintained housing.

How does this impact FE students and/or apprentices (50 words):

Students in general, across both HE and FE, should be included in the definition of students for a Decent Student Homes Standard and Student Housing Ombudsman, which would expand protections to FE students and apprentices. An academic difference does not justify the segregation of student categories regarding housing and quality of life during attending HE or FE.

How does it impact black, disabled, LGBT+, trans and women students? (50 words):

It is critical that students from marginalized groups have their voices heard and interests protected on something as important as housing. Often housing becomes a matter of mental and physical health. Therefore, the time spent studying and away from "home", which can often be abusive, should be a safe space for vulnerable groups.

How does it impact on International Student, Postgraduate Students, Part Time and Mature students? (50 words):

International students already pay huge fees to attend UK universities. Keeping housing costs down, is therefore a benefit.

Postgraduate, especially postgraduate taught, students are less likely to know an area if they are attending for one year, increasing the risk of ending up in poor quality or expensive housing at present.

Is there a particular impact or response for small and specialist institutions? (50 words):

No – these proposals would impact students across the UK in broadly the same way.

Does this apply across the UK or specifically in England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland? Would there be different consequences for the proposal in different parts of the UK? (50 words):

The government proposals referenced in the expanded submission were originally made in England, however we believe that students' need for high quality, low cost housing is universal and that the adoption of improved standards and transparency regulation would have similar positive consequences across the UK.

What action could NUS, students and SUs take to work on this? (100 words):

At a national level, the NUS could lobby for a Decent Student Homes Standard and a Student Housing Ombudsman with the government. This could involve working with SUs to gather student housing stories and data from across the country to illustrate the importance of this work, especially during a cost of living crisis.

The NUS could also support individual SUs to pursue greater levels of transparency at a local level, which would later be critical in demonstrating good practice to other institutions and moving to a generally less opaque approach across the whole sector.

TO: Assembly

FROM: SU President

RE: Accommodation Fees: Discussion

DATE: 9 February 2023

Background

On January 20, 2023, Durham University announced they are increasing their accommodation fee cost by 10.3%. Student maintenance loans will only increase by 2.8%.

The most common Durham University college accommodation package will now cost roughly 150% of the average student maintenance loan.

A student on an average maintenance loan will need to find around an extra £4K just to cover their University accommodation fees. Durham's accommodation is now some of the most expensive in the Russell Group, outside of London, and as Durham's biggest landlord, this increase in rent will continue to fuel high rents charged to students in the private housing sector.

Students will be aware that inflation is driving costs up everywhere and understand that the University's costs are impacted by this, however students are also facing a cost of living crisis with little extra support for them as a demographic group.

The University have chosen not to subsidise college accommodation fees and pass the full increase in cost over to students.

Student leaders, JCRs and student societies are calling upon Durham university to:

- Reverse the planned increase in the cost of college accommodation
- Introduce a fee cap for college accommodation which is calculated relevant to the maintenance loan
- Further increase the amount of college accommodation available for returning students
- Host a public meeting with student leaders and student groups about the above issues

Assembly is asked to discuss:

Clearly, students should be concerned with this decision. But what is the long-term solution? Colleges cost a lot to run compared to other University accommodation because they provide a lot more than just accommodation (e.g., libraries, gyms, WSE, bars, student support etc.).

How could college accommodation be made cheaper? Are there aspects of what colleges provide that could be/should be cut to reduce the cost to students?

Assembly is asked to resolve:

To set up a task & finish group to:

- consider fully the options for reducing college accommodation fees
- conduct consultation with students on how college accommodation fees should be cheaper
- make a recommendation to next Assembly meeting on 9 March