

DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

There will be a meeting of Assembly at 1800 on Thursday 7 March 2024, 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, notification of any other urgent business not on the agenda.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS ON 23 NOVEMBER 2023 (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2324/11

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

Routine business items

3. PROCEDURE FOR ALLOCATING REPRESENTATIVES TO NUS CONFERENCE 2024 (PRESIDENT, 5 MINUTES) UA/2324/12

To approve the procedure for allocation representatives to NUS Conference 2024.

4. NUS DELEGATES ELECTION (CHAIR, 10 MINUTES)

To elect NUS delegates to attend NUS Conference 2024 (subject to approval by Assembly members.)

5. BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2324/13 TO FOLLOW

To receive update report from the Board of Trustees.

6. OFFICER ELECTION RETURNING OFFICER REPORT (CHAIR, 5 MINUTES) UA/2324/14

To note the returning officer report for the Durham SU Officer Election 23/24.

7. UPDATE QUESTIONS (CHAIR, 15 MINUTES)

To receive questions on updates provided by the officer team, committees, and associations:

https://durhamuniversity.sharepoint.com/:f/t/AssemblyUpdates/ErguyLWqEMBCsYKpfZI4NI4Butv6uVammlQAR_0517nJSq?e=l7GJfi

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

Items for discussion:

8. REVIEW OF DURHAM SU ELECTED OFFICER STRUCTURE: CHANGE TO ELECTION RULES (PRESIDENT, 10 MINUTES) UA/2324/15

To discuss a motion to amend the Durham SU officer elections rules.

9. GROUP COMPLAINT: UCU INDUSTRIAL ACTION (PRESIDENT, 10 MINUTES) UA/2324/16

To discuss a motion to submit a group complaint on behalf of Durham students, if industrial action is called before the end of the academic year.

10. NORTH EAST SU'S MAYORAL ELECTION MANIFESTO (UG ACADEMIC OFFICER, 10 MINUTES) UA/2324/17

To approve the Officer Team's submission to the North East SU's Mayoral Election Manifesto.

Assembly is committed to making its meetings accessible to persons with disabilities. If you consider yourself to have any access or reasonable adjustment needs, don't hesitate to get in touch with the SU governance account: dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk at least 2 days in advance of the meeting to ensure arrangements can be made.

DURHAM SU ASSEMBLY

DRAFT MINUTES OF THE MEETING 23 November 2023

PG21, Pemberton Rooms, Palace Green.

1. OPENING OF MEETING

RECEIVED: apologies, conflicts of interest, notification of any other urgent business not on the agenda.

Daniel Lonsdale, President opened the meeting as interim chair, until the election of the chair.

DL welcomed members, and attendees, and explained etiquette for the meeting. He said that no offensive or unacceptable behaviour would be accepted and any disruption may result in a person being removed from the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETINGS ON 25 MAY 2023 AND MATTERS ARISING

ACCEPTED: the minutes as an accurate record of the previous meetings.

3. ASSEMBLY TRAINING

RECEIVED: a presentation on training for Assembly members.

Routine business items

4. CHAIR ELECTION

ELECTED: the Chair of Assembly for academic year 2023/2024.

DL advised members that voting for the Assembly Chair election was now open and would close before the access break later in the meeting.

There were two candidates for the role of Assembly Chair: Oliver Davis, and Oliver Cunnell. Manifestos for both candidates were available to view upon logging in to vote.

The candidates each made a short speech in support of their candidature.

5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

RECEIVED: a presentation on Assembly and Committees in the 2023/24 academic year.

The Secretary to Assembly, Gary Hughes, presented a report to members on committees of Assembly. The Standing Orders required that there be an election to the committees at this meeting. The committees had been new in 2023/24 but there had been no evidence of them achieving their purpose.

The committees are not needed to make Assembly happen, as the meeting can happen under the authority of the Secretary. The Durham SU Officers will report directly to Assembly.

Assembly members will be invited to join a conversation in January to suggest something new, which may be brought to the Assembly meeting in March.

Assembly members resolved to not elect assembly committees for the 2023/24 academic year, and to consider new options at a future meeting.

6. RATIFICATION OF RETURNING OFFICER AND APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES

RATIFIED: Peter Robertson as Returning Officer and the appointment of Liam Isaac and Rob Drury as trustees to the Durham SU Board.

7. ASSEMBLY ELECTION RETURNING OFFICER REPORT

NOTED: the Returning Officer report for the Assembly Membership Election 2023/24.

8. UPDATE QUESTIONS

RECEIVED: questions on updates provided by the officer team, committees, and associations:

It was quiered if a report would be provided by JCR Presidents Committee at the next meeting. DL will speak to the Chair before the next meeting.

****ACCESS BREAK****

Items for discussion:

9. RATIFICATION OF DURHAM ESTRANGED AND CARE EXPERIENCED ASSOCIATION

RESOLVED: DEaCE as a recognised Association.

Isi Ali and Tash Deacon presented the motion and said there was currently no representation for this group, so the Association would seek to reach more students with similar experiences and to raise awareness as to who these students are and the problems that they face.

There is currently limited support provided by Durham University, whereas other Universities have scholarships that are specifically dedicated to estranged or care experienced students, as they are more likely to be in poverty or struggle with finances.

There were no speeches against the ratification.

DEaCE was approved as a recognised Association, and Assembly agreed the necessary amendment to the Standing Order.

10. TREATMENT OF GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DURHAM UNIVERSITY

RESOLVED: a motion on the Treatment of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Durham University.

Skye Carroll proposed the motion and said that introduction of ChatGPT has brought generative AI into the media and universities have reacted but there is not currently much guidance on how it should or should not be used. This motion seeks to address that and look at what the policy should be and how guidance should be developed by the university.

There were no speeches against the motion.

The motion **PASSES**.

DL announced Oliver Cunnell as the Chair of Assembly.

Oliver Cunnell took over proceedings as Chair of Assembly.

11. REVIEW OF DURHAM SU ELECTED OFFICER STRUCTURE

RESOLVED: reform of the Durham SU elected officer structure.

The proposer accepted a minor amendment for clarification prior to the meeting.

DL proposed the motion and said this followed a review of the current structure and aims to include more part-time representation to make positions more appealing as students can hold a role while still studying. A part-time role for JCR and MCR representation has also been incorporated into the new structure.

A speech in opposition said that colleges and common rooms can exclude people of colour, and other marginalised groups of students, and they do not get good engagement in any event. Due to the structure of common rooms and culture of the college, many students don't engage with their JCRs and engage with the SU and its student groups.

A speech in favour thought that JCRs did have high engagement.

Members noted that the proposal made a lot of sense with the limited amount of resource available, and would gain a wider representation of students.

The Secretary clarified that the JCR/MCR position would not need to be contracted to employment, and could be a compensation of time.

The motion PASSES.

12. AFFORDABILITY AND STUDENT INCOME DEFINITIONS

RESOLVED: a motion on affordability and student income at Durham University.

DL proposed the motion and said that Durham is unaffordable. This motion focuses on housing but incorporates anything related to the cost of living for students in Durham.

A speech against the motion noted that 35% rent/income is low and needs to be higher.

The motion PASSES.

13. SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE

RESOLVED: a motion on solidarity with Palestine.

The Secretary clarified that the motion had been submitted in the proper fashion, and apologised for delays, due to consultation with the Durham SU trustees and relevant student groups, before circulation to members. The motion had been circulated in a timeframe consistent with the regulations for emergency motions, so was consistent with the rules that Assembly had set for its business. A note from the trustees had been added to the motion.

A motion was proposed, and it was said that it been written informed by existing Assembly policy and addressed the treatment of Palestine by the Israeli government. Innocent people, including Durham students, are being affected every day because of the bombing in Gaza. There has been a significant rise in islamophobia and antisemitism on UK campuses.

The Chair moved to discussion of the first amendment.

Matthew Brooker said he believed the current motion targets Jewish and Israeli students and is not representative of views of the whole student body. His amendment addressed this, and clearly condemned Hamas and terrorism.

A member spoke against the amendment and said that every person in the UK condemned Hamas as a matter of law. She said that it was legitimate to disagree with the motion, but that the amendment deleted all mention of the occupation in Palestine and the amendment could not claim to be representative of the views of the whole student body.

There was a speech for the amendment which outlined the awful attacks that had taken place against Israel and Israeli people by Hamas, including personal experiences, and family members that had been killed as a result of the attacks of Hamas.

There was a speech against the amendment which said the motion acknowledged that innocent Palestinians were being targeted and killed by the Israeli military as a result of the attack by Hamas.

The amendment **FALLS**.

The Chair moved to discussion of the second amendment.

Will Brown proposed the amendment and said that it was important to ensure the University promotes academic freedom on this matter.

There was a speech against the amendment and said that it was not germane to the motion.

The amendment **PASSES**.

Oliver Davis proposed a procedural motion to vote on the motion by secret ballot and said this would protect people's identity in voting on a difficult subject.

There were no speeches against the procedural motion.

The procedural motion **FALLS**

The Chair introduced the motion as amended.

There was a speech against the substantive motion, which said that the only acceptable motion would be one which had universal support on campus. The speech suggested that Durham SU should support Israeli students as well as Palestinian and should not have an opinion on anything which doesn't unite all students.

The motion **PASSES**.

There was no other business.

Meeting closed 20:08.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Dan Lonsdale (Durham Students' Union President)

RE: Procedure for Allocating Representatives to NUS Conference 2024

DATE: 7 March 2024

Assembly Notes

1. NUS Conference is a democratic conference held by the National Union of Students, which all member students union's are entitled to send representatives to, in order to discuss current issues for students, vote on policy, and hold NUS to account.
2. The 2024 Conference will take place on 17-18 April 2024.
3. Durham SU is entitled to send a maximum of 7 representatives to this conference. 50% of this delegation, rounded down, must self-define as women. Therefore, three of the positions must be held by students who self-define as women.
4. The current SU President is required to act as Lead Delegate to NUS Conference in accordance with Standing Order F.
5. A separate proposal has been submitted to Assembly regarding the future election of Durham SU positions, including the election of NUS Delegates.

Assembly Believes

1. As NUS Conference is a student democratic event, Assembly, as Durham SU's highest student democratic body, should decide the process by which representatives to NUS Conference should be elected.
2. That Durham SU is currently in a transitional period due to the current Officer review, and therefore an alternative election method is required to ensure Durham students' representation at this year's NUS Conference.
3. Durham SU's newly elected 2024-25 Full-time Officers have been elected by cross-campus ballot, and so satisfy NUS's condition that NUS Delegates be elected by a cross-campus ballot.
4. The Full-time Officer positions have a responsibility to "Represent the general interests of all Durham students to Durham University, and others." (Standing Order F), and therefore have a democratic mandate to be the spokesperson for Durham students.
5. Due to the current review of Durham SU's Officer structure and ongoing reforms to NUS, it has been unclear whether a cross-campus ballot would be necessary to select Durham's NUS Representatives.

Assembly Resolves

1. That the newly elected Durham SU Full-Time Officers, alongside the current SU President, will attend NUS Conference in 2024.
2. That the remaining four NUS Representative positions be elected by members of Assembly for NUS Conference 2024.
3. That the future election of NUS Representatives beyond 2024 be decided via a second proposal.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Dan Lonsdale
RE: Durham SU Board of Trustees Report
DATE: 7 March 2024

BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT TO ASSEMBLY

The Board of Trustees met on 28 February 2024 and the following points were considered:

- An update on Durham SU's activity in the past quarter.
- The report from the Returning Officer into the February 2024 elections for the full-time Officers, which is also on the agenda for the meeting of Assembly.
- A paper outlining the options that Assembly would consider in respect of the elections of part-time Officers.
- The Trustees' Annual Report, which will follow to a Student Members Meeting, and would be filed with Durham University, the Charity Commission and Companies House.
- A review of how Durham SU considered strategic risk in 2022/2023, and the strategic risks likely to need address in 2023/2024.
- The size and shape of the Board of Trustees in the future, given the reduction of the number of Officer trustees.

Following ratification by Assembly, Rob Drury joined the Board of Trustees. Hannah Sketchley resigned from the Board of Trustees.

Returning Officer's Report Durham Students' Union

Election	Student Officer Election
Returning Officer	Peter Robertson, NUS Charity Director
Deputy Returning Officer	Gareth Hughes, Chief Executive

Dates of Nominations:	08-01-2024 – 28-01-2024
Dates of Voting:	07-02-2024 – 12-02-2024
Number of Candidates:	8
Number of Votes:	1879
Percentage of Voter Turnout:	8.5%
Number of Complaints/Appeals:	4 Complaints & 0 Appeals Received
Number of Complaints/Appeals Upheld:	0 Complaints & 0 Appeals Upheld

Returning Officer's Comments/Recommendations

The Returning Officer recommends that the SU review their guidance on:

- campaign expenditure and 'gifting'
- the way in which endorsements may take place

in order to ensure the fairness of elections going forward.

Confirmation of Fair Election

I hereby declare that this election was run in a fair and democratic manner which satisfies the stipulations as laid out within the 1994 Education Act.

Returning Officer Signature and Date

Signed: 
NUS Charity Director and National Returning Officer

Date: 15/02/2024

TO: Assembly

FROM: Dan Lonsdale (Durham SU President)

RE: Review of Durham SU Elected Officer Structure: Change to Election Rules

DATE: 7 March 2024

Assembly agreed to change the roles on the Officer Committee at its last meeting. It changed the full-time Officers and created part-time Officers for the first time.

The law requires that full-time Officers can only be elected in one way, in a cross-campus ballot of all students, but there is much more flexibility in the part-time Officer roles. This means that the Standing Orders needed to be updated and Assembly asked that no part-time Officers be elected until it had a chance to review the Elections Rules.

The nature of the part-time roles suggests that different parts of the student community will vote for their own representatives: it'd be weird if students in the Business Faculty for example, could stand or vote for the Science Faculty President, and students who are undergraduates shouldn't expect that the Postgraduate Research Students Officer is accountable to them, and so on.

The invitation to share in the discussion about part-time Officer election methods was shared with all members of Assembly, shared on Durham SU's social media, emailed to all students, and discussed in specific consultation workshops. For Assembly members who would want to make sure that the issue can be consulted on with the people they represent, the proposal is published in the Assembly papers two weeks before the Assembly meeting on 7 March.

The proposal before Assembly suggests that cross-campus ballots are used for the four Faculty Presidents, the International Students Officer, and the Societies Officer. This election method will be the same as the full-time Officers, but there'll be a restriction on which students can stand and vote in the elections.

A cross-campus ballot will also be used for the Liberation Officer, but the Returning Officer has asked Assembly to offer guidance on which students should be included in the constituency of those who can stand and vote for the Officer. The current Welfare and Liberation Officer has been asked to bring a paper to the next meeting of Assembly.

The consultation showed that three communities of students; postgraduate research students, welfare volunteers, and sustainability activists, would not wish to stand in a cross-campus election, and a cross-campus election was not viewed as the best way to engage in dialogue and gain a mandate from those communities as students. An experiment is proposed, in which three events are held in the Easter term, to elect a student leader to be the Postgraduate Research Officer, the Welfare Officer, and the Sustainability Officer. These events will be evaluated, and the conclusions shared with Assembly to decide as to continue with these events into the future.

'Welfare volunteers' to elect the Welfare Officer is intended to be an inclusive definition of the wide number of students who volunteer in welfare roles across the university, who register to participate in a welfare focussed event each year.

This should include Welfare Officers of student groups, Common Rooms and other student organisations, and general executive members of student groups that support student welfare such as Nightline. The intention is that students who have a stake in student welfare come together at an event to choose one of their number to represent their interests and, therefore, the welfare event should seek to include volunteers in the electorate rather than exclude them.

'Sustainability activists' to elect the Sustainability Officer is intended to be an inclusive definition of the wide number of students who are passionate about or campaigning for or studying sustainability across the university, who register to participate in a sustainability focussed event each year.

This should include Officers of student groups, Common Rooms and other student organisations focussed on sustainability, and general executive members of student groups that focus on sustainability such as the Climate Society, the Conservation Society and the Student Energy Society. The intention is that students who have a stake in sustainability action come together at an event to choose one of their number to represent their interests and, therefore, the sustainability event should seek to include volunteers in the electorate rather than exclude them.

JCR and MCR PresComm operate largely autonomously and the proposal at the last Assembly was that the Committees elect one of their members to be resourced to lobby the University and the students' union on behalf of their peers. This remains the proposal.

Finally, the proposed new Elections Rules provides for Assembly to appoint certain students to external bodies such as Durham University and NUS.

Assembly is asked to APPROVE the new Elections Rules.

Amendment 1 (from Dan Lonsdale)

The proposal for new Elections Rules contains the provision that in all Durham SU elections, there must be an option for students to be able to spoil their ballot. This is very usual in a paper ballot, but not electronic elections. This allows students who want to participate in the democratic process to express dissatisfaction with the candidates.

The proposal, however, does not include a requirement that there be an option on all ballots to void the election, usually known as 'ReOpen Nominations'.

This follows a recommendation from elections officials that Assembly definitively confirm that they believe that RON is a positive contribution to democratic participation.

The recommendation has come from the election's officials on the basis that a vote for RON doesn't need or require any other person to contribute anything else to the democratic debate; it allows "not these" without any "this instead". It doesn't progress any democratic exercises, but stalls it instead, and makes future engagement from candidates and voters more difficult.

Assembly is asked to discuss what RON adds to the elections process, and what having the RON option does to help students to express their democratic priorities. It is important to note that the original proposal contains the 'spoil the ballot' option, so

- A vote for this amendment would remove the 'spoil the ballot' option and insert RON.
- A vote against this amendment would keep 'spoil the ballot'.

Assembly can then decide whether to adopt the new Elections Rules as amended,

As President, I believe that it is right to offer the amendment to Assembly which is:

“Delete “All elections shall allow voters to indicate that they wish to spoil their ballot.”

And replace with “All elections shall allow voters to void the current election by voting to ReOpen Nominations (RON)”.

Appendix 1

Standing Order C: Elections Rules

The Returning Officer

The Returning Officer will be appointed by the Board of Trustees, subject to ratification by Assembly. The Returning Officer must not be a member of Durham SU.

The Returning Officer will report annually to Assembly and, through the Board of Trustees to the Council of Durham University, on the extent to which elections to the Officer Committee have been fairly and properly conducted. The principal duty of the Returning Officer is to promote and safeguard the interests of the student electorate in fair elections.

The Returning Officer has authority to interpret the Elections Rules and will publish Guidance consistent with the Elections Rules to support candidates, campaigners, and voters, in understanding their roles in the elections.

The Returning Officer will appoint the Chief Executive or their nominee as the Deputy Returning Officer. The Deputy Returning Officer will administer elections to the Officer Committee on behalf of the Returning Officer.

The Secretary to Assembly will be the returning officer for referendums, elections to Assembly and for all Durham SU student groups. The Secretary to Assembly may appoint suitably qualified and trained persons to act on their behalf, which may include student members as appropriate.

Major Offices

All members of Durham SU are eligible to stand and vote in an election for major office, subject to also being able to serve as a trustee.

Other Offices

Durham SU makes appointments to non-major union offices in different ways.

Durham SU trustees

Durham SU student trustees are elected in a cross-campus ballot.

No student who holds office as a Durham SU trustee may also hold another office under the Standing Orders; for the avoidance of doubt, this does not include any position within any Durham SU student group or any position within other student organisations, subject to the successful management of any interests.

By ballot

A ballot is an election in which all members within a defined constituency may stand and vote for their representatives.

- For Faculty Presidents, the constituency is all students enrolled on a course aligned to a particular Faculty of Durham University.
- For the International Students Officer, the constituency is non-UK fee paying students at Durham University.
- For the Societies Officer, the constituency is full members of Durham SU's student groups.
- For the Liberation Officer, the constituency is self-defining students of a marginalised community, as defined in the Standing Orders.
- For members of Assembly, the constituency is as defined in the Standing Order which creates members of Assembly.

- For student groups, the constituency is full members of the student group, unless by agreement an election is conducted of some of the members.

By event

An event is an election at a defined time and place in which all members who are registered to attend may stand and vote in an election.

- The Postgraduate Research Students Officer will be elected at an annual conference for postgraduate research students.
- The Welfare Officer will be elected at an annual development event for welfare volunteers.
- The Sustainability Officer will be elected at an annual campaign event for sustainability activists.

By nomination

The membership of the Committee of Junior Common Room Presidents, and the Committee of Middle Common Room Presidents, is comprised of nominees from Durham University Organisations and from independent charities. Each Committee will nominate one of their members to serve on the Officer Committee for one academic year, and Durham SU will compensate them for their time within a formal agreement.

By appointment

Assembly will accept nominations from the Officer Committee to make appointments.

- One member of the Officer Committee, who must be a postgraduate student, to serve on the Council of Durham University with the President *ex officio*.
- One student from each Faculty to serve on the Senate of Durham University, with the President, Education Officer and Community Officer *ex officio*. The Officer Committee will ensure that at least two student members of Senate are postgraduate students, and at least two student members of Senate are international students.
- To conferences of the National Union of Students, with the President *ex officio*.

Referendums

A vote of all Durham SU student members may resolve a question as set out in Article 100. The Secretary to Assembly will determine the exact language of a question to ensure that the question may be resolved with an unambiguous outcome.

A referendum need not be restricted to a 'yes' and 'no' vote, and may be used to rank preferences.

Other matters

All Durham SU elections and referendums are counted under the rules for the single transferrable vote.

A limit may be imposed on campaign expenditure by candidates, and the trustees may also award a grant from Durham SU to support campaigning.

The Returning Officer should take reasonable steps to ensure that any election is a contest between Durham SU's members. The unreasonable contribution or influence of other independent organisations may be considered as an unfair advantage or disadvantage, and may be considered under the complaints process, and a candidate may be sanctioned in the interests of a fair election.

All elections shall allow voters to indicate that they wish to spoil their ballot.

Elections Guidance

Elections Guidance must contain:

- The process for nominations from students eligible to stand in an election.
- Standards of behaviour expected of candidates and their campaign teams during the election and campaign period, based on the [Durham SU Code of Conduct for Student Members](#).
- Any other policies and procedures which apply to candidates and their campaign teams, such as the social media policy, the data protection policy, the management of interests policy, the expenses policy, and the right to request reasonable adjustments for accessibility.
- The process by which votes will be cast, counted, and the result declared.
- A complaints process, with detailed steps as to how any complaint will be handled consistent with the Elections Rules.

The complaints process

Complaints in respect of campaigning or voting should be received before the close of ballot. A result will not usually be declared unless outstanding complaints have been resolved. Candidates and their campaign teams are expected to cooperate promptly and fully in the event of a complaint being made in respect of their actions.

Complaints should be made in a manner consistent with the Durham SU statutory complaints procedure. The Deputy Returning Officer has initial authority to consider complaints and will establish the facts to the best of their ability, consider whether any Durham SU rule or policy has been engaged, and may make an initial ruling on the balance of probabilities as to an appropriate outcome.

The Deputy Returning Officer may impose a sanction if a candidate or campaign team has acted in breach of any Durham SU rule or policy. The sanctions available are: a requirement to act on guidance or undertake training, a formal warning, a final warning, or expulsion from the election. Any appropriate sanction may be applied without a need to impose a warning before expulsion. A failure to act on guidance, undertake training or heed a warning may be considered as an aggravating factor in further complaints.

A candidate who has had a ruling or sanction imposed on them may appeal the decision of the Deputy Returning Officer to the Returning Officer if they have grounds for appeal. The grounds for appeal are: that there was procedural irregularity at the first stage of the complaints process, or there is new evidence which for good reason was not previously available to the Deputy Returning Officer. There is no ground to appeal on the basis of disagreement with a sanction.

The Durham SU statutory complaints procedure is appropriate to consider a complaint that no confidence can be placed in the conduct of an entire election but is not a further appeal to a ruling of the Returning Officer. Any such complaint should be addressed to the supervising trustee in the first instance, who will report to the University Secretary.

Any complaint in respect of a Durham University or Common Room rule should be made to the appropriate organisation in the first instance. Complaints which don't have any apparent relevance to the Durham SU Elections Rules may be declined or referred to the matter to the appropriate organisation.

TO: Assembly

FROM: SU President

RE: Group Complaint: UCU Industrial Action

DATE: 7 March 2024

Assembly notes:

The Durham University Complaints Procedure for Students is clear that *'This Procedure may be used by Groups of students who wish to complain about the same matter and who jointly submit a complaint'* and that *'Complaints may be about the University's Action (or lack of Action) in relation to a matter concerning the student'*.

Industrial action, or at least the threat of industrial action, by the University and College Union is now an annual occurrence. Durham SU has long supported the right of academic and professional staff to exercise their lawful right to take industrial action but, whether an individual student supports the general right, or a specific example of industrial action, this *is* the reality of higher education in the UK.

Durham University, therefore, has a responsibility to protect our academic and consumer rights *in anticipation* of future industrial action. We shouldn't be expected to seek individual enforcement of our rights through the complaints procedure as if there was no opportunity to reduce the likelihood or impact of industrial action in advance. We are entitled, collectively, to know what will happen to us if we don't have the academic or consumer experience we have been promised.

Durham University, in response to representation by Durham SU, has been developing its academic policies in advance of any future industrial action to ensure that our academic rights are protected. We welcome this work. This is an example of how representation and partnership work can be effective in the academic interest of students.

Durham University hasn't set out how it will respect our consumer rights in advance of any future industrial action. It suggests that it is only able to assess the impact of industrial action on our consumer rights post hoc, on an individual basis.

We do not accept that this is the case. Very many other organisations across the UK have a published policy which says 'If your experience is disrupted or reduced or other than we promised, then this is what we will return to you, without you needing to go through a complex and burdensome complaints process'. Durham University could do the same if it wanted to.

Assembly believes:

We believe that nothing prevents Durham University from having a policy position on student consumer rights, and not having such a policy -whether by active decision or otherwise – is a lack of Action on behalf of Durham University. A Group Complaint is possible, and desirable, to seek enforcement of students' consumer rights.

We believe that a Group Complaint is not opposite to, or instead of student representation, and we hope that continued dialogue and negotiation with Durham University by the Durham SU Officers results in a constructive consumer rights policy statement without any enforcement action being made because of a complaint. If such a statement were produced, a Group Complaint wouldn't be necessary, or viable, and wouldn't be upheld.

Assembly resolves:

But, in the likelihood that no University in the UK has yet wanted to respect student consumer rights enough to publish such a statement, we ask Durham SU to coordinate a Group Complaint on behalf of Durham students, to be submitted if industrial action is called before the end of the academic year.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Will Brown (Undergraduate Academic Officer)

RE: Durham Contribution to North-East Mayoral Election Manifesto

DATE: 7 March 2024

Assembly notes

On May 2 2024, an election will take place for the new mayor of the North East combined authority (Newcastle, County Durham, North Tyneside, Gateshead, South Tyneside, Sunderland). Following the devolution deal¹, the combined authority and its new mayor will have increased powers, as well as a £1.4 billion investment fund over 30 years.

Durham SU has been collaborating with other SUs in the North-East (Newcastle Students' Union, Sunderland Students' Union, Northumberland Students' Union) in the lead up to the North-East Mayoral Election. Alongside these SUs, Durham SU intends to present a combined manifesto to the candidates with a list of demands for the new mayor.

Assembly believes

The new mayor will have increased powers in several areas including: housing, finance and transport. Each of these areas has an impact on the lives of students, so it is essential that Durham students engage in the upcoming election and ensure student interests are responded to.

By working with three other SUs, a combined manifesto will make the demands all the more powerful.

Assembly resolves

To approve the following submission from Durham SU to the North-East SUs Mayoral Election Manifesto.

That the completed North-East SUs Mayoral Election Manifesto will include contributions from other partner SUs, and therefore will require editing, which will be undertaken by the SU Officer Team in collaboration with the above SUs.

¹ [North East devolution deal - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/north-east-devolution-deal)

Durham Contribution to North-East SUs Mayoral Election Manifesto

Housing

1. Support the promotion and development of co-operatives
 - a. We propose that the mayor both financially and politically supports the development of alternative models of housing across the region, namely housing co-operatives, in a bid to challenge the power of landlords.
 - b. The key benefits associated with housing co-operatives are principally: control over rents and rent-setting, increased democratic ownership over the home due to the absence of landlords, improved community ties and associated benefits, such as better mental health, and greater opportunity to develop modes of sustainable living².
 - c. Housing co-operatives have proven highly successful in a variety of isolated contexts. In Berkeley, USA, there is the [Berkeley Student Cooperative](#), which has over 1300 members and 20 properties and has been paving the way since the early 20th Century in affordable housing. Closer to home, [Edinburgh Student Housing Cooperative](#)³ stands as a shining example of the co-op model in practice, with 106 student residents in a property charging less than £100 pounds a month what the previous owners were.
2. Uniform landlord licencing rules across the North-East
 - a. A key challenge for students is the quality and standards of the homes they are renting.
 - b. Across Durham, for example, there are variations in the application of mandatory HMO licensing. Most notably, in the most student-dense post-code, DH1, there is little licensing at all. As a result, a key priority of our work has been securing additional licensing for the DH1 area to bring HMOs of less than 5 beds up to standard and make these standards more enforceable.
 - c. In the same vein, we propose a much more robust, uniform, set of licensing rules which are applied across the North-East. Whether a property is in Sunderland, Newcastle or Durham, there are clearly some fairly objective standards regarding quality which could be agreed and enforced by their

² "Lessons from the History of Affordable Housing Cooperatives in the United States: A Case Study in American Affordable Housing Policy" by Gerald W. Sazama, 2000.
 Avilla-Royo, R., Jacoby, S., & Bilbao, I. (2021). The Building as a Home: Housing Cooperatives in Barcelona. *Buildings*, 11, 137. <https://doi.org/10.3390/buildings11040137>

³ Kallin, H., & Shaw, M. (2019). Escaping the parasite of the student flat: Reflections on an experiment in co-operative housing. *Radical Housing Journal*, 1, 223-226

respective councils. As such, we propose the development of these rules are supported by the mayor, to improve housing standards across the region, not just in areas deemed to have need of them based on extensive lobbying.

3. Lobby councils to create repairs portals
 - a. We propose the adoption of the Renters (Reform) Bill⁴ guidance on Privately Rented Property Portal service within the North-East, specifically highlighting its benefits for both student accommodation and the broader private rented sector. This legislation mandates landlords to register on the Property Portal, ensuring legal compliance and providing a centralized hub for guidance.
 - b. The Property Portal enhances transparency for tenants, offering comprehensive information before renting and empowering them to enforce their rights. Additionally, it serves as a valuable data source for local councils, addressing challenges in identifying non-compliant properties and owners. Implementation in the North-East aligns with our commitment to housing standards, promoting transparency, and safeguarding residents' rights. This initiative will not only streamline administrative processes but also contribute to a responsible and transparent private renting environment for all constituents.
4. Operate as the 'sign-off' for licencing and housing certificates
 - a. We propose that the Mayor should be the officiant for sign-off of licensing and housing certificates. Whether due to capacity issues, a lack of transparency or failing to meet the basic criteria in the first place, the certification for properties across the North-East have not been published.
5. Add timescale to repairs instead of 'reasonable time'
 - a. Currently, landlords must carry out repairs within a 'reasonable time'⁵ of the issue being reported. The law does not state how long a reasonable time is – it depends on how urgent the issue is and how vulnerable those living at the property are. This can lead to issues taking a prolonged time to be resolved and tenants living in sub-par conditions.
 - b. We propose that the mayor supports the addition of timescales for when issues should be resolved. Issues can be categorised depending on severity⁶ e.g. a broken boiler should be addressed within 2 days, whereas a leaking tap should be addressed within 4 working days. Setting timescales will give

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/privately-rented-property-portal-renters-reform-bill>

⁵ [How long should a private landlord take to do repairs? - Shelter England](#)

⁶ [Understanding Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenants Act 1985 - Taylor Bracewell](#)

landlords more accountability for addressing issues and provide tenants with knowledge of when they can expect problems to be resolved.

6. Cap “no guarantor” upfront payments at 2 months rent
 - a. If students are not able to provide a UK based guarantor (either because they are international, estranged, care experienced or from low income backgrounds), they are often asked to pay several months’ rent upfront⁷. This can lead to several issues – students may not be able to afford this, they may struggle to get reimbursed should they have to vacate the property and it may disincentivise landlords from maintaining the property.
 - b. We propose that the mayor support the limitation of rent that is required to be paid upfront if tenants cannot provide a UK based guarantor.
7. Lobby to include students as an independent group in local council schemes
 - a. We propose that the mayor should be the officiant the sign-off for licensing and housing certificates. Whether due to capacity issues, a lack of transparency or failing to meet the basic criteria in the first place, the certification for properties across the North-East have not been published: ‘More than 20 per cent of shared homes (HMOs) in the county - 193 in total - have expired gas and electrical safety certificates, according to the latest data. ’ This is especially problematic in county Durham where we struggle to even keep track of a comprehensive HMO list yet alone to follow up on houses that do not meet the minimum standards.
 - b. The mayor, in acting as an officiant for these safety checks and housing certificates, ensures that an external body has accredited the property on the bare minimum of safety while holding the county accountable for performing these checks and updating their data regularly⁸

⁷ [What to do if you can't get a guarantor | Advicenow](#)

⁸ [Safety failings exposed in hundreds of County Durham homes | The Northern Echo](#)

Cost of Living

1. More public spaces with heating that are suitable for studying / Support for Warm banks⁹
 - b. We propose to extend the opening times of public libraries as well as council buildings, churches, community spaces, museums to the public. This would provide students with more options for studying, working and accessing resources as well as reducing their living costs and improve their educational outcomes. Additionally, public buildings should be adequately equipped as study spaces, including providing facilities for basic food preparation like microwaves, hot water fountains and fridges.

Transport

1. Combined regional student ticket across all modes of transport
 - c. Soaring costs and a huge backlog of driving tests have made car ownership increasingly less accessible for younger demographics¹⁰ This makes the need for affordable and easily accessible public transport even more crucial for young people, including much of the North East's student community.
 - d. We are asking the new mayor to use their regional influence and significant powers over transport to take the next step in optimising the accessibility of public transport by working with service providers to implement combined ticketing, especially for students and young people, valid across the three main modes of public transport – bus, metro, and train – that serve our region.
 - e. Combined ticketing will make it more feasible for students to live further out from their campus, allowing them access to more affordable housing and better blurring divides between 'student' and 'local' areas. It will also allow students to explore more of the North-East outside of their university towns and cities, increasing their civic connection to the wider region and boosting local economies.
 - f. The successes and ambition of Greater Manchester's *Bee Network* (which plans to introduce combined ticketing by 2030),¹¹ championed by Mayor Andy Burnham, shows what is possible with the creation of Combined Authorities when mayors invest suitable political and financial capital into

⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/warm-banks-uk-cost-of-living-crisis/>
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/warm-banks-uk-cost-of-living-crisis/>

¹⁰ A. Robbins, 'How cars went from the ticket to freedom to an unaffordable luxury', *The Telegraph*, 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/money/consumer-affairs/death-of-the-car-young-are-giving-up-on-car-ownership/>

¹¹ C. Vitale, 'Manchester Bee Network set to launch 2025 integrated ticket rail pilot', *Railway Technology*, 2023, <https://www.railway-technology.com/news/manchester-bee-network-set-to-launch-2025-integrated-ticket-rail-pilot/?cf-view>

public transport. We hope that the North-East mayor will be similarly ambitious, including around combined ticketing.

2. Discounted fares for all students including mature students

- a. As a 2022 Sutton Trust Study¹² found out, the North-East is the region within the UK where students are most likely to commute to University, many of whom by public transport. As it stands, however, the current student travel provisions are inadequate. The 16-25 railcard has a minimum fare during peak week-day times, precisely when many students will be commuting to lectures. Similarly, while many bus companies in the North-East do offer student tickets, these are not universally offered and have been steadily increasing in price over the last few years, with day tickets in Durham having increased from £1 to £1.50. The Mayoral Authority has a devolved budget of up to £732.3 million over the next five years specifically to be spent on the development of local transport, and we are asking that a portion of this budget be put towards subsidising fares for all students in the North-East region.

¹² [Microsoft Word - Home and Away - formatted final final \(suttontrust.com\)](https://www.suttontrust.com/research/microsoft-word-home-and-away-formatted-final-final/)