

## Council

May 2018

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### Durham Students' Union Update

#### Proposed Resolution

This report is for the information of Council members.

<b>Communication Status: Paper</b>	Open	x	Open Internal		Confidential Restricted/External	
<b>Communication Status: Appendices</b>	Open		Open Internal		Confidential Restricted/External	
<b>Freedom of Information Exemption and Rationale</b>	Paper: Open					
	Appendices: N/A					

#### Previous Consideration by this or other Committee

None

#### Further Committee approval required

None

#### Appendices

None

This is my final report as Durham SU President, so I'd like to thank my fellow Council members for supporting, guiding, and challenging me throughout my year. It has been a pleasure to work with you all as individuals, and being a member of Council has genuinely been a highlight for me.

This report addresses:

- Current priorities for Durham students.
- Strategic student sector development issues, for Council's consideration.
- Developments within Durham SU.

### 1. Priorities for Durham students

#### 1.1 College fees

Council members may have seen students' protests against the increasingly inaccessible Durham housing market [in local press](#). This protest arose following a meeting of the Student Fees and Awards Advisory Group (SFAAG).

Students were assured that a discussion at SFAAG would, as one might expect, be able to advise UEC on fees. Council may know that discussions on the value of SFAAG have been ongoing for some time but, while it exists, it has a responsibility within the University's good governance framework to acquit its duties responsibly.

Durham SU produced a paper on relative student hardship, in order to inform SFAAG's discussion. The time and efforts of Durham SU's student leaders and professional staff had been devoted to this work on the understanding that representation would result in negotiation and an outcome which all sides could respect, regardless of final decision. I was therefore surprised and frustrated to discover that the management submission into SFAAG was exactly 59 words long. This sends the clear signal that the University was not prepared to consider representations and we had essentially engaged in a pointless exercise which demonstrated a lack of respect for Durham students and their students' union. I was even more disappointed that SFAAG, a committee with five student representatives, avoided giving advice to UEC (with obviously zero student representatives), and referred the decision upwards.

Durham students understand that negotiations do not always result in decisions that they are happy with, but asking people to engage in ineffective and inefficient activity is disrespectful. It also prevents Durham SU focussing on the very many other ways in which we could make a positive impact for our members. Council is asked, again, to make clear that it expects mechanisms established by the University to negotiate with students to actually do as expected. If UEC is, again, to act without advice from SFAAG then I would expect them to receive direct representations from Durham students at their meeting.

## *1.2 University culture, and the experience of student representatives*

I felt it necessary to raise concerns with the Vice-Chancellor that have come from a number of student representatives, and in particular from women. My predecessor also raised these issues at the end of her year, on behalf of women students that she had worked with, at all levels of University engagement. The Vice-Chancellor's response was as I would have hoped and expected, but I believe it is important to bring the matter to Council's attention.

The only way to address these concerns is to name the unacceptable behaviour: student representatives have been de-legitimised by a number of University colleagues and this usually has deeply sexist roots. Adults seeking to engage in constructive conversations about how to make Durham the best University it can be have been treated like children, and women in particular have been dismissed as naïve and singled out for criticism in ways that have not been applied to men. This must be challenged publicly and stopped quickly.

This is not a matter of 'over-sensitivity'. Students fully understand the difference between conversations where University colleagues are listening, agreeing, unable to agree, or directly questioning student representatives. Some colleagues, however, seem to have difficulty in responding appropriately to student representatives, and I believe Council must lead a change in behaviour. It would be unreasonable to expect the driver for change to start in students, who are often volunteers and always have less experience and power in University spaces. It is also important to note that in discussing these experiences, a number of women University staff have also described identical experiences.

I share these concerns in this report because my experience at Council has been positive, and I have felt able to challenge ideas and engage in difficult conversations. I have, however, experienced unacceptable behaviour in other parts of the University and many women student leaders have also shared their regrettable but preventable experiences with me. I

believe change can and should come from those with leadership roles, including the governors and the Executive.

The examples shared with the Vice-Chancellor, and in direct feedback to colleagues who have demonstrated unacceptable behaviour, are challenges to living our University values and characteristics. In my view, they are also a direct barrier to achieving our strategic performance measures of women Faculty.

Council could usefully share its good practice in being open with student members - not hiding important information because it's 'too complex for students' or taking tough decisions in secret 'to protect us' – and in having a care for who forms key decision making bodies – while diversity in recruitment is a known area of work, ensuring a gender balance and a culture of respect in working groups and Committees throughout the University would be good.

### *1.3 Pincident: combatting sexual violence, harassment, assault, and discrimination*

At the start of June, [Durham SU launched Pincident](#), an anonymous online mapping tool to record incidences of assault, violence, harassment and discrimination, as well as bystander intervention in Durham. The launch was very successful: giant pins wandering around Durham sparked lots of interest, and the launch post on the Durham SU Facebook page reached 10,500 people. Durham SU worked closely with the University's Sexual Violence and Misconduct Operations Group, the Cohesion Team at Durham Constabulary, and Durham County Council in the development of the tool, and will maintain these close relationships to evaluate and further develop the tool. Pins are colour coded by incident type: sexual, racial, religion, LGBT+ and disability related, and purple pins denote bystander intervention. Since its launch, [over 50 incidents have been submitted to the tool](#). Durham SU and students are being creative and demonstrating leadership, alongside the University, in tackling the threat and fear of sexual violence and making Durham as safe as we can for our friends and colleagues.

### *1.4 8am lectures; student consultation on the impact of growth*

Council members may also have seen news in [Palatinate](#) and [the Times](#), among others, about the introduction of 08:00 lectures in the new academic year, as increasing numbers of students in Durham City create pressures on available teaching space.

Durham SU understands the reality of too many people in too little space but, again, I would express strong concern that a decision in planning from December 2017 wasn't shared with the students' union, or any students on affected courses through University Committees. We all found out about the change in practice after the decision, after an email from an academic to students was reported in Palatinate.

It is increasingly difficult for student leaders from this year to have confidence that the University values working in partnership when there are so many high-profile examples where this is clearly not the case. I firmly believe that this critical press activity was preventable, is explainable, but the Executive's actions made it inevitable. Council's support in making clear that this should not happen again would be appreciated.

## **2. Strategic student sector development, for Council's consideration.**

### *2.1 Alcohol, and cultural development*

Durham SU was very proud to [successfully gain accreditation in the NUS Alcohol Impact programme](#), following a sustained period of close work with University colleagues. The commitment to improving work across campus has been recognised by an independent review team, and we're grateful to the contribution of many people.

### **3. Developments within Durham SU**

#### **3.1 *Strategy and brand launch***

Durham SU launched its new brand at a reception at Durham Town Hall in June. I'd like to thank the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Colleges and Student Experience) for the kind words he said about our constructive relationship at the event.

Council members can expect to see the new brand released over the summer, ready for A-level results day. It was developed following extensive student research and engagement with University colleagues. I'm very proud of the results of our work, and confident that we're making a big step forward in developing the relationship we want with our members.

#### **3.2 *Student leader development***

In June, 26 welfare officers from across the Colleges and Associations headed to Berwick to spend 3 days on Durham SU's inaugural peer supporter training residential. Welfare officers engaged in a wide variety of sessions, many of which were delivered by two professional external trainers who joined us from the University of Manchester. Sessions included learning a technique called 'co-counselling', focusing in on what exactly the role of a welfare officer is, approaching difficult support scenarios and a presentation of research carried out by the Welfare and Liberation Officer into the issues they're likely to face in their year in office. The training was an opportunity for peer supporters to get to know one another more closely, and we spent time working collaboratively to design campaigns and a peer supporters' network.

In August, the Durham SU Officers and Common Room Presidents will head to York for a leadership residential, designed to help elected leaders understand the strategic developments in the year ahead, the skills and behaviours of a successful student representative, and the support network they wish to create for themselves. We'll be working with a facilitator with a background in adult education and campaigns at Amnesty International, Republic, Abortion Rights, and NUS.

Both of these events demonstrate how seriously Durham SU takes its role in ensuring the quality of student leadership, and developing their ability to contribute positively to the future of our University. This is in line with our new strategy, and has been warmly welcomed by the student leaders themselves. I'd like to thank the office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Colleges and Student Experience) for his support of these events, and we'd hope to build on these, such that they become a fixture of the Durham calendar.

#### **3.3 *Durham SU Awards***

The Durham SU Awards were held in June and were a resounding success. We were delighted to build on our national success (including, if Council remembers, the fact that Durham students have won the National Society Awards' Best Event of the Year (Charity Fashion Show) and Campaign of the Year (It's Not OK at Durham), the Student Publication Association Publication of the Year (Palatinate), as well as the SPA's Reporter of the Year (Tania Chakraborti, College of St Hild and St Bede).