

Council
30 October 2018
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Durham SU Report
Proposed Resolution

Council is asked to note the contents of this report.

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

Previous Consideration by this or other Committee

N/A

Further Committee approval required

N/A

Appendices

None

1. Executive Summary

1.1 As the President of Durham SU, I present this report, which addresses:

1.1.1 Priorities for Durham students.

1.1.2 Strategic student sector development, for Council's consideration.

1.1.3 Developments within Durham SU.

2. Priorities for Durham students

2.1 College fees and the cost of Durham

2.1.1 On Wednesday 10 October, the University announced in an email to all students that College residence charges will rise in line with the Retail Price Index of inflation for the 2019/20 academic year. This will take the cost of a standard catered room to £7,672 and the cost of a standard catered en-suite room to £8,149. This decision is incredibly disappointing for Durham SU, as we had made representations to UEC requesting a freeze in fees and for the use of the CPI measure of inflation. We are concerned about the impact this decision will have on the University's ability to fulfil important strategic objectives relating to widening access and participation, improving

relations with the local community and increasing the number returning students living in college accommodation.

- 2.1.2 We look forward to receiving a report to the November Council meeting looking at the college fees in relation to the cost of running the colleges, though we are again disappointed that this work has been delayed after an undertaking from the Executive that this data would be made available to the October meeting of Council.
- 2.1.3 We are pleased to note the increase in financial support that will be offered to students starting in Durham in 2019/20 and welcome this, though we believe that Durham's bursary offer must improve further to meet the costs of living and studying in Durham. We are actively engaged in the University's newly established Financial Awards Committee, and we welcome the opportunity to work with both Common Rooms and Experience Durham to improve the affordability of Durham's wider student experience in the coming year.

2.2 Lecture Capture

- 2.2.1 At the start of this academic year, the University began the roll-out of Encore lecture capture technology. We welcome this move, which is strongly supported by students, because this technology will provide significant benefits for students, particularly those with specific learning requirements and international students. The roll-out of this technology is also of great importance in light of the University's decline in performance on the 'Learning Resources' section of the National Student Survey.
- 2.2.2 We are also pleased to note that the opt-in rate so far sits at around 80% and we would encourage further work to be done to reassure academic colleagues about the benefits of using the technology. We have however, been made aware of some difficulties owing to capacity issues in CIS. This is further evidence of the need for scrutiny of the University's information infrastructure and performance that we expect following substantial and sustained investment in CIS and IT across the University.

2.3 Development of student organisations

- 2.3.1 Durham SU takes its role in supporting a culture of student leadership seriously. The University supports Common Room leaders to some extent, but has been unable to develop their capacity as effective representatives and campaigners, so we were delighted to commit resource to meeting our responsibilities this summer.
- 2.3.2 From 7 August, we held the first ever student leadership residential, which was attended by Durham SU Officers, Common Room Presidents and Experience Durham sabbatical officers, facilitated by student sector experts and Durham SU staff. Feedback suggests that this was widely seen as successful and we will be working to improve the course with a view to holding this on an annual basis.
- 2.3.3 We continue to step up to our responsibilities to support student leadership. The JCR Presidents' Committee Chair (Will Lewington, John Snow College) has now been invited to join the Durham SU Leadership Team, and Durham SU has committed staff resource and an operational budget to support the campaign effectiveness of these leaders. We will, further, deliver a review event for all leaders at the end of Michaelmas term.

2.4 Durham students in the community

- 2.4.1 Durham's local community continues to express understandable anxieties about the University's expansion plans, with tensions between Durham's student and local

communities persisting. Durham SU knows healthy engagement between the student body and the local community is mutually beneficial, enhancing the experience of Durham students and making Durham City a more pleasant place to live.

2.4.2 We are fully engaged in the University's new Community Engagement Task Force and have been working closely with the University's Community Liaison Officer. We will produce a complementary community engagement strategy that represents the student interest in this work, which will set out key student priorities for Durham City and how we believe we can most effectively engage in this area in the coming years. We are currently meeting with local representatives, including local County and Parish Councillors and City of Durham MP, Roberta Blackman-Woods, who we hosted for a positive meeting on Friday 12 October. We are also planning visits to other universities, including Birmingham and Leeds, to learn from the work they have carried out regarding community relations.

2.4.3 On 1 November we are hosting our event 'A celebration of students and the local community'. Last year, Durham SU funded several groups of students to produce artwork about Durham's cultural history, which they will be showcasing at the event. Also speaking at the event will be Ross Forbes, Programme Director for the Durham Miners' Association, and a number of key student and local community stakeholders have been invited to attend.

2.5 Freshers' Week

2.5.1 The University's Induction week took place during the week commencing 1 October and appeared to be a success, with teams of student volunteers (Freshers' Reps) helping students to settle into their new college communities. Durham SU held our Freshers' Fair over two days at Dunelm House and Elvet Riverside, in partnership with Experience Durham. The fair was attended by over 4,000 students each day.

3. Strategic student sector development, for Council's consideration

3.1 National Student Survey

3.1.1 Durham SU were [disappointed to see the University's scores in the annual National Student Survey decline by almost 5% overall](#), with falling satisfaction shown in every University-related question. Whilst we recognise the potential flaws with the survey, we believe the data provides a valuable snapshot of students' attitudes towards their education at Durham and that such a dramatic decline in satisfaction demands immediate and concrete action from the University Executive and Departments.

3.1.2 We welcome initial discussions that have taken place with the PVC Education, Provost and Faculty PVCs, which have demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing student concerns and we look forward to working with the University to further shape an effective response. One issue particularly keen to address is the University's poor performance on the learning communities question, which should be an area of strength given the collegiate system and, as a new area of focus in the NSS, does not appear to have been wholeheartedly 'adopted', such that it is clear who is accountable for required improvement. As part of this work, we are determined to play our part, and are looking at how we can best support Durham SU's academic societies and enhance their role in building strong scholarly communities.

3.1.3 Another area of particular importance is the continued fall in satisfaction regarding student voice. To address this we are reviewing the effectiveness of current academic representation structures and we hope that the new student consultation framework will help to embed a greater culture of student voice at Durham.

- 3.1.4 Finally, the fall in student satisfaction regarding learning resources, is of great concern and shows the need for continued investment in library and IT facilities, particularly given the increased pressure being put on these resources by increasing student numbers. An effective roll-out of lecture capture technology will also be crucial to securing greater satisfaction in this area.

3.2 Student Mental Health

- 3.2.1 As Council will be aware, student mental health has been highlighted as a key concern across the sector, with the Universities Minister Sam Gyimah [recently endorsing Student Minds' University Mental Health Charter](#) and calling upon institutions to use [UUK's 'StepChange' framework](#) to prepare for the launch of the charter.
- 3.2.2 This year, the University will create its own institution-wide mental health strategy, and we will ensure that the strategy effectively meets the needs of students.
- 3.2.3 At Durham SU, our Welfare and Liberation Officer led a campaign for Mental Health Awareness Day on 10 October, sharing students' stories and experiences of mental ill health. Staff and Officers at Durham SU also recently undertook Mental Health First Aid training provided by Mental Health First Aid England, and we would like to work with the University to extend this to a greater number of student leaders and staff across Durham, who have expressed a desire for greater training in this area.

4. Developments within Durham SU

4.1 Quality Students' Unions

- 4.1.1 [Quality Students' Unions](#) is an accreditation scheme developed by NUS to assure the quality, standards and overall effectiveness of students' unions. Durham SU has successfully completed Part A of the Quality Assurance Framework and we are currently working on Part B, which is due for submission on 15th December. This focusses on 12 areas of core effectiveness, including governance, leadership and management, activities, and outcomes.

4.2 New Trustee Recruitment

- 4.2.1 Following a successful recruitment process, Clare Powne (former Head of Library and Culture Services at the University of Exeter) has been selected to join the Durham SU Trustee Board as one of our lay trustees, following a very high quality recruitment campaign. Clare attended our board meeting on 28 September as an observer ahead of her name being put to SU Assembly for formal approval in November. We look forward to Claire's expertise helping us progress our Education campaign strategy over the coming years.