

Student Consultation Framework

Durham Students' Union

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What is the Student Consultation Framework?

The Student Consultation Framework outlines a minimum expected standard of consultation to be used by all areas of the University, including the Students' Union, when planning projects, strategies and decision making. It recommends a minimum standard of consultation to be used, based upon the impact that the change will have on Durham University students. The framework provides a detailed breakdown of appropriate consultation steps to be taken, methods of communicating the process to students, and also methods for communicating the outcome of consultation back to students, all depending on the type of decision being made.

Similar frameworks have already been successfully implemented at both Oxford and Imperial College London, and a number of other Students' Unions, such as Leeds Beckett SU, are currently in the process of creating something similar. With the cost of coming to University being at an all-time high, the student population are more eager than ever to have a say in their education; the Student Consultation Framework aims to enable them to do so in a standardised and consistent way. Durham University have a responsibility to consult with their students on the changes that affect them.

Why should you use it?

The framework aims to build trust between the various areas of the University and their students, and also aims to standardise consultation across the University. Good consultations can increase engagement from students and improve responses to national surveys like the NSS, particularly in light of the new questions added in 2017, and the PTES/PRES. It is hoped that, following the introduction of the Student Consultation Framework, students will feel they can trust that the decisions being made by the University are sufficiently informed by student opinion.

How does it work?

- Step 1: Select appropriate level of impact for decision using student reference group
- Step 2: Choose and follow appropriate consultation steps
- Step 3: Select relevant student reps to work with during consultation
- Step 4: Collate results
- Step 5: Make decision informed by student opinion
- Step 6: Communicate outcome of consultation and decision made to students

Please note that the steps above are to provide guidance for consultation structure only; they are not definitive and further steps may be required.

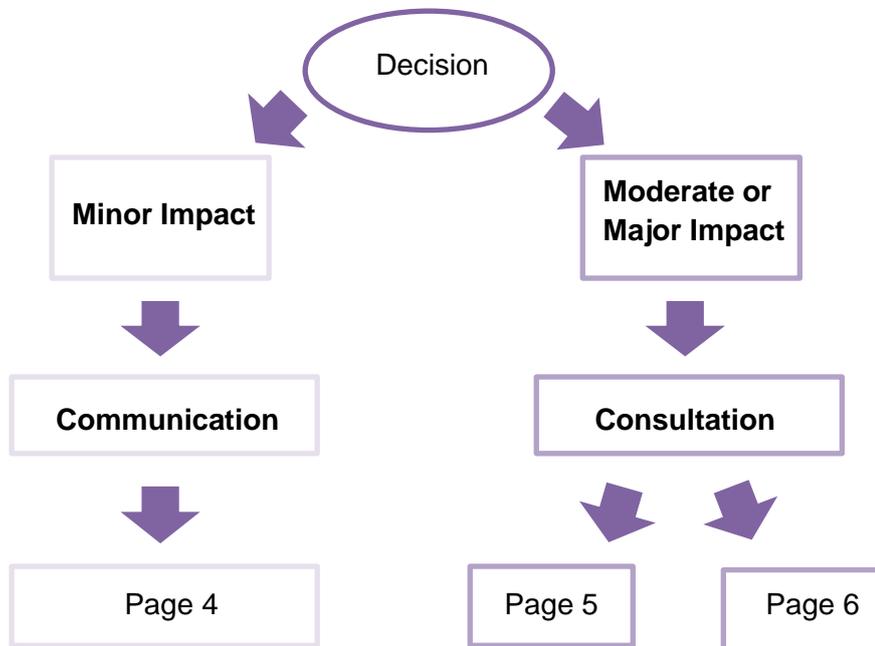
The Framework

Step 1: Decision Impact Matrix

Below is a decision impact matrix outlining three levels of impact that a decision can have on the lives of students. Choose the most appropriate level of impact based on your decision. You may also take your decision to the Student Reference Panel (SRP), which consists of 8 students (3 student reps and 5 random students), in order to get a more thorough understanding of its impact before proceeding. Please email rebecca.henderson@durham.ac.uk to get an item to the next SRP.

Impact Factor	Context Examples			
	Academic	College	Union	University
Minor Impact <i>A change with minor impact on lives of students and not likely to influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i>	e.g. changing advertised coursework or exam dates, changing location of lectures, revision to wording of exam title	e.g. changing cleaning arrangements, change of welfare contact details or opening times, change in catering provisions	e.g. changing opening hours of outlet, refurbishment of room regularly used by students, change in event details or time	e.g. refurbishment of lecture theatres, changes to basic IT services (like storage space), change to service opening times
Moderate Impact <i>A change with moderate impact on lives of students and likely to somewhat influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i>	e.g. change in range of course module options, change in academic support available, restructure of department or course, introduction of new course	e.g. temporary closing of area for building work, change in level of welfare provision available, opening of new facilities, change in college room access arrangements	e.g. change to services available, opening of new facilities, removal of student equipment, change in facilities regularly used by students	e.g. opening of new building or department, walkway or carpark redevelopment, change in IT services provided (like a software or platform)
Major Impact <i>A change with major impact on lives of students and likely to heavily influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i>	e.g. change in length of teaching day, removal of course or department, change in previously agreed assessment methods	e.g. closing of a college, purchase of a new college, removal of service provided (like welfare), relocation of common room, college library or social facility	e.g. review of democratic structures, closing down of existing facilities or services, Union building relocation, major reduction in student group funding	e.g. closure of service or building, increase in accommodation or tuition fees, introduction of new ICT provisions (like a new e-learning platform)

For decisions that are deemed to have only a Minor Impact on the lives of students, it is recommended that information about the decision made is **communicated** to students. For decisions that will have a higher level of impact on the lives of students (i.e. Moderate or Major Impact), appropriate **consultation** steps should be taken.



Step 2: Consultation Phase

Communication Steps: Minor Impact Decisions

Timescale:

Information to be communicated a reasonable amount of time before change occurs

Required Communication Steps:

1. Contact affected students (via email or other similar method) in advance of the proposed change with initial information including reasons for change, date for change to occur and a clear route for students to respond
2. Contact relevant student reps (via email or other similar method) to disseminate information on proposed change and gather any feedback from students
3. Contact relevant under-represented groups of students (i.e. students with disabilities, international students, LGBT+ students, mature students, students of colour) **if** change is likely to have a specific impact on one of these groups
4. Keep communication open throughout process if necessary, both with affected students and student reps, by sending regular updates

Optional Communication Steps:

1. Social media poll or small-scale survey (i.e. twitter survey, online survey via email, physical paper survey in areas where affected students would be found) carried out by relevant student reps if formal student feedback is required
2. Hold an informal face-to-face meeting advertised to all affected students

Consultation Steps: Moderate Impact Decisions

Timescale:

Consultation to be completed at least one month before decision is made. Whole process, from start of consultation to decision being made, should take around three months.

Required Consultation Steps:

1. Liaise with relevant SU officer to define timeline, marketing plan and date for decision to be made before starting consultation
2. Contact affected students (via email or other similar method) with initial information including:
 - background reasons for change to occur
 - consultation timeline
 - action plan (including marketing plan)
 - proposed date for decision to be made
 - a clear route for students to respond
3. Contact relevant student reps to disseminate information on proposed change and allow them an appropriate amount of time to gather any feedback from student cohorts
4. Contact relevant under-represented groups of students (i.e. students with disabilities, international students, LGBT+ students, mature students, students of colour) if change is likely to have a specific impact on one of these groups
5. Formal call for ideas from affected students (i.e. in the form of a ballot, survey, adding dedicated section to department website, enquiry form on department website, providing dedicated email address for ideas to be sent to, forming a target question for raise your voice activity)
6. Hold at least one face-to-face meeting, in conjunction with relevant student reps, advertised to all affected students, to deliver information on change and allow for input from students

Optional Consultation Steps:

1. Attend a relevant staff-student meeting, if one occurs in the consultation timeframe, to put forward proposed change and gather feedback from representatives

Consultation Steps: Major Impact

Timescale:

Consultation to be completed at least two months before decision is made. Whole process, from start of consultation to decision being made, should take around six months.

Required Consultation Steps:

1. Liaise with relevant SU officer to define timeline, marketing plan and date for decision to be made before starting consultation
2. Contact all students (via email or other similar method) with initial information including:
 - background reasons for change to occur
 - consultation timeline
 - action plan (including marketing plan)
 - proposed date for decision to be made
 - a clear route for students to respond
3. Contact all relevant student reps to disseminate information on proposed change and allow them an appropriate amount of time to gather any feedback from student cohorts
4. Contact relevant under-represented groups of students (i.e. students with disabilities, international students, LGBT+ students, mature students, students of colour) if change is likely to have a specific impact on one of these groups
4. Formal call for ideas from affected students (i.e. in the form of a ballot, survey, adding dedicated section to department website, enquiry form on department website, providing dedicated email address for ideas to be sent to, forming a target question for raise your voice activity)
5. Hold at least three small face-to-face meetings with interested students (i.e. students who provide ideas in previous consultation steps) at varying times and locations, aiming to involve these students in the decision making process.
6. Hold at least one large meeting (i.e. town-hall style meeting), in conjunction with relevant student reps, advertised to all students, to deliver information on change and allow for input from students

Optional Consultation Steps:

1. Attend a relevant staff-student meeting, if one occurs in the consultation timeframe, to put forward proposed change and gather feedback from representatives

Step 3: Student Rep Categories

Step two recommends using 'student reps' to disseminate information to students during the consultation/communication process. The most relevant group of student reps needs to be chosen depending on the nature of the proposed change (e.g. for academic changes either course reps or faculty reps would be the most relevant). The below table contains a non-exhaustive list of some of the students reps in place in Durham.

Rep Type	No.	Description
College JCR Presidents	16	Responsible for representing UG students, in each college, on all college-related affairs. Relevant for moderate to major college-specific changes relating to UG students.
College MCR Presidents	16	Responsible for representing PG students, in each college, on all college-related affairs. Relevant for moderate to major college-specific changes relating to PG students.
College Union Reps	16	Responsible for representing all students, in each college, on Union-specific affairs. Relevant for moderate to major Union-specific decisions relating to all students.
College Exec	160+	Responsible for representing students on specific areas of college life, including welfare, social life and sport. Relevant for any changes relating to specific areas of college life.
Association Presidents	5	Responsible for representing specific groups of students who are under-represented through other routes, e.g. Mature Students, Students with Disabilities, LGBT+, International Students & People of Colour. Relevant for changes to specific under-represented groups of students.
Student Group Exec	800+	Responsible for representing students in their interest groups. There are around 200 different student groups with different areas of interest. Relevant for Union and University changes affecting groups of students with specific interests.
Experience Durham Exec	200+	Responsible for representing groups of students involved in sport, music, theatre and volunteering (outside of Union societies). Relevant for changes relating to specific areas of student extra-curricular activities.
Faculty Reps	9	Responsible for representing all students in each faculty. Relevant for moderate-major academic changes affecting a whole department or faculty.
UG Course Reps	300+	Responsible for representing undergraduate students at a course level. Relevant for all academic and university related changes affecting specific UG course groups.
PG Course Reps	300+	Responsible for representing postgraduate students at a course level. Relevant for all academic and university related changes affecting specific PG course groups.
Student Officers	5	Responsible for representing Durham Students at a national level. Relevant for all major changes affecting large numbers of students, including nationwide and legislative changes.

Step 4: Collate Results

Once all steps have been carried out, the results should then be collated and analysed.

Different analysis techniques should be applied for the different consultation methods used. It is recommended that at least one form of qualitative analysis is used as a minimum for all levels of consultation, and that quantitative analysis techniques are used on top of this as and when required (mainly needed for Moderate to Major Impact decisions).

Step 5: Make decision

Once all of the data has been collated and analysed the decision should then be made, taking into consideration the student opinion.

For Major impact decisions, it is recommended that at least two student reps, who were involved at the start of the consultation, are present in the group when the final decision is being made. For Moderate impact decisions, it is recommended that at least one student rep is present in the group when the final decision is being made.

In order to improve the transparency of the decision-making process and maintain a good relationship with those who have been consulted, it is important to include a justification for why the decision has been made in this way (particularly for Moderate and Major Impact changes). In doing this, it is hoped that students will be more likely to feed into future consultations and help make the process as representative as possible.

The University staff member working on the project must also now include a 'Student Consultation' section in any papers that are presented to UEC, Senate or any other significant decision-making body within the University. This section should outline the consultation steps taken and the impact on the proposed change as a result of consultation.

Step 6: Closing the Feedback Loop

Once the consultation process has been carried out, the results have been analysed and a decision has been made, the outcome of the consultation needs to be communicated back to students.

For all levels of consultation, a report of the data collected should be produced and made available to both the Students' Union, and to the general student body. This aids with the overall transparency of the process. A marketing plan should have been agreed at the start of the process to ensure that announcements are well prepared and that student leaders are aware of the decisions being made.

In addition to this, depending on the impact factor of the decision made, the following table outlines some required methods that should be used to relay the information back to students directly.

Impact Level	Steps
<p>Minor Impact <i>A change with minor impact on lives of students and not likely to influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i></p>	<p>Must use a minimum of the following <u>TWO</u> feedback methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact affected students straight after decision has been made via same method used initially 2. Contact relevant student reps straight after decision has been made via same method used initially <p>Must at least include the following as minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explanation for outcome of decision <p>Optional extra methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Media post detailing outcome of consultation
<p>Moderate Impact <i>A change moderate with impact on lives of students and likely to somewhat influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i></p>	<p>Must use a minimum of the following <u>THREE</u> feedback methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact affected students soon after decision has been made via same method used initially 2. Contact relevant student reps soon after decision has been made via same method used initially 3. Formal meeting advertised to all affected students to provide personal update <p>Must at least include the following as minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outline all possible outcomes that could have come from the decision 2. Describe the process used to consult with students 3. Explain rationale for chosen outcome of decision <p>Optional Extra Methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Newsletter sent to affected students only 2. Posters/other physical marketing tools displayed in relevant student communal area detailing outcome of consultation
<p>Major Impact <i>A change with major impact on lives of students and likely to heavily influence students' review of their time at Durham.</i></p>	<p>Must use a minimum of the following <u>THREE</u> feedback methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact all students soon after decision has been made via same method used initially 2. Contact all student reps soon after decision has been made via same method used initially 3. Formal meeting advertised to all students to provide personal update <p>Must at least include the following as minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Outline all possible outcomes that could have come from the decision 2. Describe the process used to consult with students 3. Explain rationale for chosen outcome of decision <p>Optional Extra Methods:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formal update/news letter sent to all students 2. Posters/other physical marketing tools displayed in relevant student communal area detailing outcome of consultation

Exceptions to Framework

There are a couple of regular decisions that are made year on year within the University, for instance accommodation fee setting and tuition fee setting, and for these decisions a more specific and detailed consultation process is required. This framework is designed to put in place a process for dealing with one-off decisions that will impact on the lives of students; for recurring decisions that require student consultation, the Students' Union and University will jointly agree a standardised process, separate to this framework, to be carried out annually. There may also be exceptions to the timescales detailed in the framework and in these instances an appropriate timescale can be agreed with the SU officer involved.

Contact

If you have any queries about the Student Consultation Framework please contact our Policy Manager, Rebecca Henderson, at rebecca.henderson@durham.ac.uk