

TO: Assembly
FROM: Kate McIntosh
RE: Support for direct action against rising accommodation fees
DATE: 31 January 2019

Assembly notes:

1. In October University Executive Council decided for the fourth year in a row to raise the price of a room in college by RPI, a measure of inflation that the Office for National statistics has discredited.¹
2. Before 2016/17 fees were raised at a rate unrelated to but often higher than inflation.
3. As of 2019 the maximum maintenance loan available to home students studying outside London is £8700, and the most expensive college rooms in 2019/20 will be £8149.
4. The SU's Ripped Off Campaign has been building momentum this year, with a well-attended protest in October that attracted media attention.
5. Multiple SU student groups and Common Room Societies have been mobilising support for a freeze in accommodation fees and are considering direct action, including Aidan's Ripped Off Society and Durham University Labour Club.
6. On 17th January Durham University Labour Club occupied the Palatine Centre overnight as a 'sleep-in' against rising accommodation fees to highlight the disparity between high fees and poor-quality rooms. The protest was covered in the local press and had a wide reach on social media, with a very positive reception.
7. Rent Strikes were successful at University College London in 2015², Goldsmith, University of London in 2016³, and the University of Sussex in 2017.⁴

Assembly believes:

1. Based on the drawbacks of RPI, and the fact that fees were raised randomly before being linked to RPI in 2016/17, continued rent hikes in Durham are unjustifiable.
2. Financial impediments should not be a hurdle for anyone wishing to attend Durham University, central to which is the experience of living within the college community.
3. A successful campaign against rising fees will involve a plurality of tactics including activity by students to build support for a freeze in fees from across the community, draw attention to the disparity between room cost and room quality and, when appropriate, directly impact the University's revenue or reputation.

Assembly resolves:

1. To support further direct action against rising accommodation fees, when appropriate.

¹[<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/shortcomings-of-the-retail-prices-index-as-a-measure-of-inflation/2018-03-08>]

²[<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/dec/06/angry-students-rise-up-soaring-rents-accommodation>]

³[<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jul/06/students-win-15m-pledge-from-ucl-after-five-month-rent-strike>]

⁴[<https://www.brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk/news/education/students-celebrate-victory-after-rent-strike-threat-over-halls-1-8292050>]

2. To recognise the growing desire among Durham students for a more diverse range of campaign tactics, including direct action.
3. To mandate officers to lead research into the efficacy and logistics of rent strikes in Durham.
4. To mandate officers to provide support and expertise to students' undertaking direct action at their discretion, to ensure students' actions are effective, and compatible with the aims and values of Durham SU.