

TO: Assembly

FROM: Saul Cahill and Zoe Haylock

RE: **Access to a Durham Education**

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The belief and its justification

- Durham University is, demographically, currently deeply unrepresentative of the region it is situated in as well as the wider country as a whole. This is in part due to reputation, but also due to current and historic failures on the University's part to address the barriers to accessing Durham University.
- Durham consistently fails in recruiting Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, despite historic pressure from students, the Students' Union and national media¹. The small number of BAME students has presented challenges in creating and growing positive cultures vital in enhancing access within the University.
- For the University to contribute fully to the region as it hopes to, it must be much more ambitious in recruiting local students and tackling the culture within the University which is often off-putting to these potential students.
- Unless progress is made towards more representative student demographics, the culture of the University will remain static. This would have a negative impact on both the University's contribution to society and the student experience.

Definition of a better future

- The University should become more ambitious, undertaking activity to engage local schools and alumni who are teachers in schools serving Low Participation Neighbourhoods. This activity will both help to develop those schools and improve results, but also create strong links between local schools and the University.
- Working with the University towards a clear, long-term goal of recruiting students from backgrounds not strictly monitored by Office for Students, such as BAME students, and students from state schools.
- Stronger development of the 'pipeline' for academic development for those who arrive from underrepresented groups² in Higher Education. Specifically, ensuring that those who with the ability and desire to progress to further study are able to, such as undertaking Postgraduate study.

¹ "Half of universities have fewer than 5% poor white students". S. Coughlan, BBC News, 14/2/2019
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-47227157>

² Regulatory Notice 1 – Access and Participation Plan Guidance, pp16-17. Office for Students, 28/2/2019
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/0bcce522-df4b-4517-a4fd-101c2468444a/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance.pdf>

- Support from across the University, including colleges and academic departments to tackle exclusionary cultures and practices wherever they are found.

The barriers

- At present significant autonomy across different parts of the University can create notable inequities in access. As a result, this is an issue which must be addressed at a number of levels simultaneously.
- The existing culture represents a significant barrier to progressive policies, and in some places has actively inhibited positive change.
- Some senior staff have demonstrated support for positive changes to improve access to Durham, however this is far from universal, The importance of broadening access should continue to be demonstrated to encourage others to support further work on the area.
- Current staff demographics of the University are problematic for such policies as, in common with the student demographics, they do not accurately reflect the wider population of the country.

Belief about the change and the responsibilities

- Durham Students' Union must take a leading role in this process. Through researching initiatives which are successful elsewhere, as well as lobbying University staff and tackling exclusionary culture wherever it is found.
- Student representatives across the University, fully supported by the Students' Union, should be engaged in working towards this goal, through their positions in colleges, departments and elsewhere.
- The University itself must rise to the challenge of improving access for those of all backgrounds. This will involve strong leadership on the issue from the most senior levels of the University, as well as in-depth work to ensure that colleges, departments and other parts of the University are actively working towards the same goal.