

TO: Assembly

FROM: Jessica Madden President Students with Disabilities Association and
David Evans Postgraduate Academic Officer and
Amelia McLoughlan Welfare and Liberation Officer

RE: Durham University is Institutionally Disablist

DATE: 3 December 2019

Assembly notes:

1. Durham City has stood for centuries, with many historic buildings and an steep terrain cut by the River Wear.
2. Many of these buildings are occupied by the University and are physically inaccessible.
3. The SU and the Students with Disabilities Association (SwDA) recently undertook a survey of every teaching space across campus to assess accessibility, after the University declined to do so from its own resource.
4. Durham University recently introduced Lecture Capture facilities in many of its teaching rooms; the English department and certain individual academics currently refuse to use this technology.
5. Durham University, unlike many other Universities, does not provide funding for disability diagnostic tests for its students.
6. Durham University recently introduced a Fitness to Study Policy, under which several students with long-term ill health have been forced to end their studies prematurely.
7. Durham University refuses to admit disabled students to certain Colleges where the cost of adapting accommodation for such students is deemed prohibitive by the University.
8. The number of students of Durham University declaring a disability has increased by 150% over the past 10 years, compared to the student body growing by 22%. [1]

[1] <https://www.dur.ac.uk/student.registry/statistics/summary/1.7disability/> (comparison between Academic Year 08/09 and 18/19 figures)

Assembly believes:

1. Durham University gives little, if any, thought into the impact of estate development on disabled students, for example:
 - Wheelchair accessible desks in the Teaching and Learning Centre were blocked by immovable seats despite being opened only this year
 - Plans for a new pedestrian route on South Road to avoid physically dangerous roadside conditions originally included stepped access only
2. Certain Durham University academics are permitted to act in a disablist manner without challenge or action being taken, for example:

- Staff members utilising Fitness to Study processes as a threat to demand compliance from disabled students or suppress complaint
 - Refusing to allow laptops in class, access to notes or Lecture Capture for disability support purposes unless a student declares personal details of their disability to that individual lecturer
3. Durham University defaults to attempting to avoid the cost or effort of dealing with issues raised by disabled students, for example:
 - Refusing to release funding for dropped kerbs around campus to be installed despite multiple requests being raised on safety grounds
 - Outsourcing note-taking support to an external company despite repeated issues raised by students as to the competence of the note-takers they provide
 4. Durham University places the onus on individual students to manage their support even where the University is responsible for providing it, for example:
 - Requiring students with long-term conditions to pay for medical evidence and repeatedly justify their need for deadline extensions and other forms of concession
 - Failing to implement a proper system for communicating disability support notices to staff, requiring students to request support from each staff member individually
 5. Durham University hides behind the guise of 'tradition' in perpetuating disablist behaviours, for example:
 - Students with hidden disabilities are prevented from leaving formal dinners when their condition requires it without either disclosing their disability or facing a financial penalty
 - The refusal to move inaccessible post-graduation events held in historic buildings to alternative, accessible locations
 6. The above points are only indicative of the wider approach Durham University has towards supporting disabled students, and collectively reflect a deep-seated culture within Durham University that seeks to marginalise disabled students, and tolerates the provision of a substandard academic and wider student experience to them.
 7. As the number of students declaring a disability at Durham University continues to increase, Durham University must change its attitude to the treatment of disabled students and vastly improve the support on offer to these students.

Assembly resolves:

1. To declare Durham University as being Institutionally Disablist.
2. To demand the University create an Action Plan, in conjunction with the SU and other relevant groups, for tackling the culture of disablism faced by students of Durham, through both reform to University processes and tackling individual disablist behaviours.
3. To require the SU Officer Team, with the Welfare and Liberation Officer as the project lead, to work with the University to tackle the culture of disablism in the University, whether through the Action Plan demanded above or otherwise.