

**Durham Students' Union
Assembly COVID-19 Special Agenda**

Thursday 14th May 2020, 16:30, Virtual meeting, Zoom

Time	Subject	Who	Paper
16:30 16:40	A. Welcome	Chair	
16:40 16:43	B. Minutes of the meeting on 6 th February 12 th March	Chair	UA/1920/45
16:43 16:45	C. Apologies for absence and conflicts of interest	Chair	

Routine Business

16:45 16:50	D. Censure Investigation Outcome	Chair	UA/1920/46
16:50 16:55	E. Board Update	President	UA/1920/47
16:55 17:15	F. Officer Questions	Officers	UA/1920/48
17:15 17:25	G. Committee Questions	Committee Chairs*	UA/1920/49
17:25 17:35	H. Association Questions	Association Presidents**	UA/1920/50

****Access Break****

Items for Discussion:

17:40 18:00	I. COVID-19 <i>SU Core Position</i>	Officer Team	UA/1920/51
18:00 18:15	J. Finding a Silver Lining: Carrying forward improvements to accessibility post Covid-19 in Durham	Jess Madden	UA/1920/52

18:15	K. Academic Support	Chahat Paruthi	UA/1920/53
18:30	<i>SU Core Position</i>		

**Academic Affairs Committee, DUCK Committee, Governance & Grants Committee, JCR Presidents' Committee, MCR Presidents' Committee, Societies Committee and Union Rep Committee.*

*** Students with Disabilities Association, Durham Women's Association, LGBT+ Association, Durham People of Colour Association, Working Class Students' Association, Trans Association, International Students' Association, Mature Students' Association.*

Assembly is committed to making its meetings accessible to persons with disabilities. If you consider yourself to have any access or reasonable adjustment needs, please contact the SU governance account: dsu.governance@durham.ac.uk at least 2 days in advance of the meeting to make arrangements.

ASSEMBLY 06.02.2020

Item A: Welcome

JM opens meeting.

Reminds of procedural motions and introduces new vice chair, LC.

Motion of censure update – not suitable for discussion, motion will not be discussed at this Assembly. External consultant producing report. Accountability processes forming part of democracy review.

Item B: Minutes from 03.12.2020

No amendments. Accepted as submitted.

Item C: Apologies and conflicts and interest

Women's Assoc apologies

Item D: Board Update

KMc presents update.

Item E: Officer Updates

KMc (President)

KMc updates on UCU Strikes

Question: Signs from Uni they may try to resolve prior to action?

KMc: National dispute, likely to be resolved at national level rather than individual institutions.

KMc updates on priorities: affordable accommodation, international student survey, sexual harassment and violence. Also: respect commission, visit to the Baltics, collegiate operations review.

SJA (UG Academic)

SJA updates on priorities: decolonisation, reforming pedagogy, academic support.

DE (PG Academic)

Updates on priorities: PGT, PG access and participation, hidden academic costs.

Also: pay and conditions for PGs who teach, winter graduation.

AM (Welfare and Liberation)

Apologies received

Respect commission, Athena Swan, #FreePeriod, Student Minds, Liberation Strategy and Campaign, sexual misconduct and violence operations group.

JD (Opportunities)

Update on priorities: sustainability, Real Living Wage employer for University, Funding Gap work.

Also: eco-fest, refreshers fair

AK: for SJA, meeting with Director of Student Support and Wellbeing and Disability Support re specific learning difficulty testing

SJA: Has sent research regarding issue onwards. Will take further action elsewhere.

Student (S): for KMc, does SU have position on students not getting VfM during strikes?

KMc: Can support people who want to claim compensation, getting further training. Claiming compensation may play into consumer narrative, money from previous strikes has been spent on benefit for students. Officer team still thinking about position.

Student: Previous strike, compensation did not reach JCRs. Why was this?

KMc: SU held poll asking students where money should be spent. Same can be done this time.

Item F: Elections and Referendum Update

GH: Candidates to be announced 07.02.2020. Change in election rules. Referendum process is starting again, taking place in Easter term. Outlines proposed changes, which will be online beforehand.

Item G: Committee Updates

Academic Affairs Committee (WH)

- Work on lecture capture
- Improvements for combined honours students
- Academic support survey relating to SJA priorities

DUCK (LG)

- Developing constitution
- Working on admin charges with SU staff
- Introducing training for current and future committees
- Elections
- Upcoming events
- Working on relationships with college DUCKs

Governance and Grants (JD)

- Grant funding for student groups
- Reviewing how governance and grants works

JCR PresComm (CE)

- University compensation
- Ops catering reviews
- Open Day changes
- Updates on South College
- DSO independence framework

MCR PresComm (SM)

- Planning inter-MCR work
- Advice from current postgraduates for undergraduates
- Ops review
- Working with PG Academic, DE.

Societies Committee (J)

- Electing new chair
- Feedback from Presidents team, working with Opps team
- Working with SU on website changes
- Ratification process
- Handover document for execs

Union Rep Committee (TC)

- Working with Women's Assoc and It's Not OK on sexual misconduct and violence
- International Students forums
- Campaigning on accommodation fees
- Working on democracy with SU

Question: Governance and Grants review – why is this happening?

JD: Part of the democracy review.

Question: What are the working groups (SGC)

(J): Working groups have occurred over last 2 years. Smaller groups working on projects. Committee has decided to take whole-committee approach on prioritising issues.

Item H: Decolonising the Curriculum: SU Core Position (SJA)

SJA presents motion.

ML: Why were international students not consulted?

SJA: work is being done with ISA, this work focussed on partnership with DPOCA. International students were consulted via DPOCA. Colonialism affects people of colour.

Q: Teaching done by early career academics. How will SU taking this position going to support academics who will be asked to undertake extra work?

SJA: This is not the end of the conversation. Conversation will continue with University execs. It's important that this does not happen – that would be a mistake.

Motion passes.

Item I: Sign the SG Accord (JD)

JD presents motion.

Q: Why would University oppose signing?

JD: Don't think they will. This has to go to UEC, wanted to get Assembly's support in writing the paper for UEC.

Motion passes.

JM: Invites GH to clarify the difference between Core Positions and standard motions.

GH: Offers clarification on this difference. Actions in core positions are less clear.

Item J: Divest from Barclays (ST)

ST presents motion.

Q: Some colleges have student treasurers. Would colleges need to change banks?

ST: This motion is holistic. Yes colleges would probably need to change their banks.

Q: So colleges would have to, if this motion goes through?

ST: Yes, it's a boycott of Barclays.

CE: We can't just change banking in DSO framework – this isn't our choice. Unless University changes, we can't.

ST: Changes would be centralised from the University.

CE: So we'd be lobbying them, and we'd follow.

Q: Where would we go?

ST: Barclays is the worst offender, so demonstrating this attitude is a stance. Any substitute is better than Barclays.

Q: What about independent colleges? Would be the same issue that CE raised. Practicality of trying to change a bank is a challenge.

ST: Completely understand challenge. This motion demonstrates attitude to University. Independent colleges is a separate issue.

Q: What if people want to work for Barclays?

ST: This is a national campaign. It's about how students feel about climate change. Backlash can be negotiated.

Q: How have other Universities started to boycott Barclays?

ST: It's just about the banking relationship, taking a standard position, University already divesting from fossil fuels. It's just about banking.

JC: Concerned about the centralisation aspect of the worded motion, JCRs concerned that University will take control of finances.

ST: Keeping independence of colleges is important – happy this has been highlighted.

DE: Independent common rooms are not the subject of this motion. The SU can lobby the University. Independent bank accounts are legally distinct from University finances, regardless of the bank. Likely to involve small admin. From experience, we know University can successfully divest, as they have from fossil fuels, without causing issues for students.

Q: Should we also be limiting the advertising of these companies as possible career paths?

ST: Agrees with the point. The motion is an opportunity to express that we are not consumers – we are here to learn.

Q: How powerful could this movement be, if this is a national movement?

ST: Previous national campaigns which take a stance have been powerful and successful.

Q: Vague about the specifics on JCR impact, student impact etc. Could be reworded into moral standpoint.

ST: This is a national campaign. Understand the Durham-specific challenges due to collegiate system. This motion just asks Assembly to support the boycott of Barclays.

Many students agree in general that boycotting Barclays is great, but justifying voting position to colleges is difficult if we have to continue to use Barclays as an independent college.

JM asks that motion is displayed on screen for Assembly members to see resolutions.

ST: The specific details should not damage the overall campaign to divest from Barclays.

KMc: This would be the University's responsibility.

Q: Any reaction from Barclays on national campaign?

ST: Not that aware of

CE: Motion does not ask all Common Rooms to change their banking. It asks that SU lobbies University to move away from banking with Barclays.

SJA: Asked VC about banking with Barclays, despite divesting from fossil fuels. VC does not think it's important to divest from Barclays and students take stance on this.

ST: National campaign on attitude towards fossil fuels. Durham should take a holistic stance on our view on climate change and this is part of that stance.

S: Opportunities will open up elsewhere. It's in a bank's interest to support you in changing banks.

Moves to vote. Motion passes.

Item K: Creating an open forum (SM)

SM presents motion.

JD: Could this be a part of the democracy review?

SM: There's no harm in doing things sooner rather than later, to address tensions and offer stepping stone for future work on democracy.

Q: How will this be publicised, improve engagement with democratic forums?

SM: This is overarching view, not specific but the view would be to change Assembly format to bust existing myths about SU Assembly. Its aim is to get more students involved.

Motion passes.

ITEM L: Remove procedural motion to vote by secret ballot

LC presents motion.

S: There may be sensitive situations where people feel they can't vote truthfully.

LC: Situations have arisen where procedural motion has been voted down, as voting members should be held accountable.

JM: Clarifies that this would not extend to elections.

R: Voting members are voting on behalf of their college/Association etc. We should be held accountable for our votes and transparency is important to this.

DE: If motion stayed, members would still be involved in the decision to pass the procedural motion. Maintaining the option gives the opportunity for future use if appropriate.

LC: Voting members shouldn't have the power to make that decision.

ML: Question

GH: You can't vote on a procedural motion using a secret ballot anyway. This decision would remove the option entirely.

CG: Can't effectively represent people if secret ballot is an option.

Q: If Assembly members shouldn't have the power to choose to vote using a secret ballot, but you are asking assembly members to use this exact power to pass the motion to remove the option.

LC: The rationale behind this is different. The motion is grounded in accountability.

Q: The motion restricts future Assembly members.

S: What scenarios in the past have required voting by a secret ballot?

GH: Don't think Assembly has ever held a secret ballot. Procedural motions have only existed for 18 months – 2 years.

TC: Representative accountability is a good argument, but there's no evidence to suggest that Assembly votes actually reflect student opinion.

CG: People would care if we consulted students more.

R: Always gives student body the opportunity to give their views and have these heard. Transparency as core of democracy. Secret ballot challenges that.

TC: It would be valuable to keep this as an option.

DE: Removing the option removes future opportunities for this to be used, which in the future may be appropriate for whatever reason. Effective representation can still be achieved if this remains as an option.

LC: Representatives should represent who they are elected to represent. A secret ballot threatens this representation.

Motion tied. Does not pass.

JM: Ends meeting.

Assembly minutes: 12th March 2020

JM: Opens meeting – number of students walk in front of screen to read statement. Lack of clarity over what has happened to disqualified votes, the need for number of votes to be fully declared and decision needs to be reversed. Must issue an apology to all candidates and students. Disruption will continue if this doesn't occur.

JM: Reads statement from Associations – the need for space to remain safe, accessible and inclusive to all.

JM: Explains that as Chair of Assembly, in consultation with Governance and Grants Committee and in accordance with SO D32, calling a close to Assembly. Open Forum regarding the SU election results will occur in place of Assembly as this is deemed more important. Assembly will be rescheduled as soon as possible. Vote will take place on whether this Open Forum occurs.

Assembly votes to proceed with Open Forum.

JM closes Assembly meeting.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Chair of Assembly

RE: Outcome of an investigation into allegations of misconduct by the President

DATE: 14 May 2020

A motion was submitted for discussion at the February meeting of the Durham SU Assembly which contained 19 allegations of misconduct by the President. These allegations offered no supporting evidence but were serious in nature and implication.

The Chair of Assembly and the Durham SU Chief Executive agreed that publication of allegations without evidence would be fundamentally unfair to any person accused of misconduct; in particular, the numbers and complexity of these allegations meant that it would be impossible for Assembly to have a reasoned discussion on the motion within the rules of debate and, therefore, impossible for the President to defend herself. It would be inconsistent with principles of natural justice to allow such a motion to proceed to Assembly, as well as contrary to Durham SU's responsibilities as a democratic organisation and an employer.

The Chair of Assembly was clear that Assembly was entitled to know that the allegations had been thoroughly considered and asked the Durham SU Chief Executive to source an independent party to undertake an investigation into the allegations. The Chair approved a recommendation to appoint Jane Whalen, an experienced HR professional, SU Chief Executive and consultant, and asked for a report to be produced in time for the next meeting of Assembly.

The investigation has concluded, and the full report has been received by the Chair of Assembly and the Durham SU Chief Executive, and made available to the original complainant, the President, and the Chair of the Durham SU People and Culture Committee.

The report made four recommendations:

1. There is no case to answer as the motion is a series of allegations with insufficient, and often no evidence supporting the allegation
2. A code of conduct is created for all student leaders that outlines roles, responsibilities, accountability and the disciplinary process - steps within, evidence required and likely outcomes - perhaps along similar lines as the ACAS code and accessible to all (<https://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-disciplinary-and-grievance-procedures>). This may form part of Durham SU's democracy review and should help all parties understand what accountability is and that there is more than one way to do it.
3. Assembly is given a full breakdown of why the Trustee Board decided neutrality policy was unable to be enforced.
4. A review of how student trustees are supported in their role to understand what a Trustee is, who they represent at Trustee Board, their responsibilities and how to speak out.

Given that the independent investigation found that none of the 19 allegations presented any case for the President to answer, Durham SU will not further publish the allegations.

The recommendations have been accepted by the Chair of Assembly and the Durham SU Chief Executive and will be processed in the coming weeks. The June meeting of Assembly is expected to receive a report confirming that all recommendations have been actioned.

Durham SU now considers the matter closed.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Kate McIntosh

RE: Board Update

DATE: 14 May 2020

The Durham SU Board of Trustees met once since the last meeting of Assembly, on 9 April 2020. The trustees considered:

A finance report, which specifically addressed the impact on Durham SU's finances of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The trustees expect that the lack of trading at all in Easter term, alongside some extra costs incurred with transitioning to a new way of working caused by a sudden disruptive event, will mean the end of year forecast is a deficit in the region of £85k.

Durham SU has free cash reserves sufficient to take that level of deficit, and the Charity Commission is clear that it is appropriate for the trustees to use reserves to support the organisation in this sort of crisis. The students' union made good financial choices in the past and has built up suitable reserves; compared to other charities in the North-East where 34% had no reserves at all, and only 40% of the remainder had three-month costs worth of reserves like Durham SU.

The Chief Executive had accessed the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the Government furlough) and agreed that all student staff and a third of the career staff team were appropriate to be registered under the scheme.

A contextual analysis presentation, which helped the trustees to understand better the events and reaction around the Durham SU elections held in February 2020.

A strategic response to the Covid-19 crisis, in which the trustees agreed to reprioritise Durham SU's strategic objectives to August 2020 in the first instance, to ensure that student priorities were properly addressed in exceptional circumstances. These priorities are shown in Appendix 1. The trustees authorised the Chair and Vice-Chair to use emergency powers as may be necessary to ensure Durham SU can address the Covid-19 crisis appropriately.

Finally, the trustees considered how best to ensure that Durham SU's democratic responsibilities are met during the Covid-19 crisis. It is clear that the governing documents and democratic framework are not fit-for-purpose in general terms and, specifically, are inappropriate for the reality of online meetings. They were never written with the expectation that democratic activities could be done online, away from campus for months. There are risks associated with attempts to accommodate online processes, particularly recognising the other pressures and priorities for the students' union at this time.

The trustees also took advice from the Durham SU legal advisers, and noted that the Charity Commission is very clear that a flexible and pragmatic approach is required; a rigid compliance attitude will be inappropriate if there are risks to people, or to the good governance of the organisation. The Chief Executive was directed to deliver the

expectations of the Standing Orders as close to usual as possible, with the trustees' support for compromises to things that would be impossible or inadvisable. The trustees agreed:

- The Student Members Meeting would not be held; all of the materials will be placed online and communicated to students by email.
- Assembly would likely be too complex to hold online, but attempts should be made to hold a meeting if at all possible, within parameters agreed to secure good governance.
- No cross-campus elections would be held in Easter term: student group elections (such as Association elections) would be held under student group regulations; student trustee elections would be considered by a development group of current trustees, to report in July 2020, with elections likely in Michaelmas term 2020.

APPENDIX 1: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES TO AUGUST 2020

To the end of this year, Durham SU will:

- Come through significant disruption to the democratic and business model with confident student leadership in place, without financial re-modelling.
- Secure the student interest in completing the 2019/2020 academic year with education commitments met and with compensation for non-realised expenditure.
- Prepare student organisations for disruption over summer, focus on continuity measures, and ensure a great Freshers 2020.

GOALS WITHIN STRATEGIC THEMES

Education

Durham SU wants students to end this year with fair outcomes. This means:

- Campaigning for accessible assessment, which respects students' rights.
- An inductive appreciation of the online education experience, to support review and innovation when teaching, learning and assessment returns to campus.
- Scrutinising Durham University's recruitment, access, and admissions policy and practice, with regard to student rights in autumn 2020.

Every day life

Durham SU looks out for every students' wellbeing. This means:

- Coordinating networks of mutual support for students still in Durham.
- Campaigning for landlords to accept student hardship claims.
- Helping students exercise their contractual rights.

Communities

Durham SU cares for student organisations. This means:

- Showcasing student groups activities, building communities online over the summer.
- Being flexible so that student groups can handover remotely and plan for Freshers.
- Representing Common Rooms' interests, ensuring they're supported over disruption, and able to bounce back in autumn 2020.

Owned by students

Durham SU champions every student. This means:

- Developing an online induction and support programme for incoming student leaders.

- Lessons are learned and improvements made following the review of the Durham SU elections.
- Planning to deliver a big democratic conversation in autumn 2020.

Resourceful

Durham SU is a responsible and professional organisation. This means:

- Investing in our staff team so they can work remotely.
- Demonstrating excellent governance throughout the crisis.
- Being prudent with our finances.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Caragh Evans (JCR PresComm Chair)
RE: JCR PresComm Report
DATE: 14 May 2020

General updates:

JCR PresComm is currently trying to ensure that the collegiate and community feel of Durham (which is our unique selling point) is maintained throughout a time when we can't be physically together. We have been working with Experience Durham to create an online Wider Student Experience to compliment what we had already begun to do within our common rooms. We have also been consulting on student communications to ensure that any information is clear for students. Alongside this, we have been thinking about how we move forward with the Student's Union and communicating with them to see how we best go about doing this.

TO: Assembly
FROM: Officer Team
RE: Covid-19 (Emergency Core Position)
DATE: 14 May 2020

The belief and its justification

Durham students have a right to a quality education, good housing, and accessible wider student experience. Covid-19 has caused considerable disruption to the normal operation of the University, and to the lives and circumstances of students. Precarity, financial insecurity, and inaccessibility have been exacerbated and increased by these changes, jeopardising students' lives and wellbeing.

In order to centre students' needs and interests, as the University and wider community responds to Covid-19 and the damage it may cause in the coming months and years, we need to have a clear vision of what we know needs to be prioritised, protected and championed.

The Union believes that all students should have equal access to a decent education during and after the Covid-19 pandemic, and that it should be of an equal quality expected before the pandemic. We believe that students should not be unduly penalised for a situation outside of their control, and assessments and other academic commitments need to be considered within the context of the pandemic and mitigated appropriately.

For a significant portion of the calendar year, Durham students live in the city, often in private rented accommodation. Our beliefs about a good renting experience are set out in our Core Position on Good Quality Student Housing, and this includes the need for widespread knowledge of tenants' rights as well as access to support. The Union believes that throughout this crisis, student tenants must be treated with fairness and compassion, and should not be exploited or disadvantaged because of their student status.

Covid-19 has had many wide-reaching implications, but one of the biggest areas of concern for many is the financial impact resulting from decreased income. The Union believes that students' income is likely to be particularly affected, as students are more likely to have low-paid, part-time jobs and be reliant on seasonal income which has already been disrupted. Some students cannot depend on family support, and some students may now depend on drastically reduced family income. Both student feedback and wider research indicates that financial stress can have a negative effect on health and wellbeing, as well as academic attainment. It's therefore crucial that the right financial support is in place for students and that this support is easy to access.

Wider student experience is an asset to Durham University's reputation, but student communities have for years been sustained primarily by the hard work and dedication of student leaders and volunteers. Student communities are particularly at risk of being eroded during this crisis, and in the way the University chooses to react to it. The Union believes that the University has a responsibility to take action to protect current and future student communities and organisations, and support them to thrive throughout the Covid-19 pandemic so that all students can feel connected, supported, and part of their community.

The definition of a better future

Students should not be financially exploited by the University in order to make up shortfalls. Students should be at the heart of decision-making, where both the impacts of decisions on students' lives and their right to be co-creators in these spaces is recognised. Student consultation and co-creation is key to making the best decisions for the University as a whole.

Delivering education online should be for students' benefit - to make education more accessible and of a higher quality. Moving teaching online is not the end-goal of curriculum reform. Students should not be disadvantaged due to a lack of technological knowledge or equipment. The knowledge and expertise gained in the process of moving education online should be targeted at making Durham's educational offer more accessible and inclusive for all students, in line with the University's Access and Participation Plan. Online education should not make a two-tier system permissible, should not be used as a tick-box exercise in relation to the University's access commitments.

Postgraduate research students should not be exploited in the delivery of online education and should be valued as peers within academia as researchers and educators, and afforded support by the University as such. This includes providing support at least on a par with the support offered to research staff, including funding, to guard against such students' precarious research conditions and enable them to see their research through to completion during this time of disruption. Students and staff should be fundamental to decisions both about delivering online education, and the material that is taught and valued.

Students should be empowered to have productive relationships with landlords and letting agents that are built on mutual understanding of tenants' rights and not exploitation or fear. Students from all backgrounds should be able to be part of a community of like-minded people, and those communities should be protected and not undermined by the University's response to Covid-19. Students who require financial support should receive it easily and quickly, and should be made to feel alienated by a system and institution that views financial insecurity as an abnormality. The University should be pro-active in securing the continued existence of thriving student communities and opportunities, that are accessible to all students. Durham SU should support student communities, through student groups and Associations, and continue to work with the local community in the interests of students.

The barriers

Corporate governance in Higher Education limits the extent to which students' needs and interests guide University decision-making. Whilst the University plans to make spending changes in order to ensure financial sustainability post-Covid-19, students' interests might not be at the top of the agenda.

Not all students have the same ability to access technology that is now necessary to continue education and participate in the Wider Student Experience. Durham University staff already experience precarity and high workloads, and the teaching online requires learning new skills and an increased workload. The wellbeing and working conditions of staff are vital to the delivery of a quality education for students. Students and staff are susceptible to digital fatigue and reliant on online platforms for education and wider student experience delivery. Moreover, the extent of Wider Student Experience activity is severely limited in the current context.

Financial support from Durham University is already difficult to access, and typically requires students to provide evidence of their personal circumstances before any support grants are approved. Thus, the application process itself presents an existing barrier to accessing support, in

addition to the practical barriers of limited funding and financial resources available to the University, particularly during Covid-19.

Many students do not know their rights as tenants, and letting agents and landlords can exploit this knowledge gap. They are under no obligation to negotiate rent payments with tenants. Continued financial commitments, as well as travel restrictions which mean students may be separated from their belongings, put pressure on students and require many to seek flexibility from their landlords. International students are disproportionately affected, with some who have already travelled home without all of their belongings and some who may be unable to return home due to travel restrictions.

Accessing the University's student support services online and remotely, creates barriers for students who may need help, exacerbating pre-existing pressures and problems. Student peer support networks are under more pressure than before and facing many of the same challenges.

Belief about a way forward and the responsibilities

Student Consultation

Students MUST hold power in decisions made by the University – not just the decisions that directly affect students, but the processes and mechanisms that shape the character and values of the institution. This has never been more true than in a time of crisis. Student reps have already made significant improvements to the way the University has responded to Covid-19 and this should not be forgotten as we move forward. Departments need to make student consultation and collaboration the norm in the design of online teaching material, and the University needs to materially support student leaders to develop and safeguard their communities as they're sustained online.

Financial

The University needs to invest money into this cohort of students – through an improved hardship fund, resourcing and supporting student organisations effectively, and in the development of online learning tools, to protect students' interests now and safeguard student communities and educational experience in the future. The University needs to ensure that the education students were promised is delivered and students can complete their studies to the best of their ability, before focussing on the hypothetical needs of future students. This includes resourcing solutions to the problems of inequality of technological access and inadequate study space.

The University should not consider raising fees – for college rooms or tuition, - in order to make up shortfalls caused by Covid-19. Students should not be treated as a means to an end, by providing the cash the University needs to continue at its current rate of growth with a dramatically reduced educational experience. Staff and student goodwill should not be exploited – solutions to the problems we face will take considerable time and effort and staff should be treated and remunerated fairly.

Student Voice

Durham SU student representatives will co-create solutions to the problems we face now and those that may emerge with the University. Durham SU will work to join the conversation on national student issues and will continue to shape the response of national student organisations.

Durham SU will empower students by educating them on their rights as students and tenants, so students' expectations about their educational experience can be met. Durham SU and hold the University to account for its consultation, communication and decision-making.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Jess Madden (President, Students with Disabilities Association)

RE: Finding a Silver Lining: carrying forward improvements to accessibility post Covid-19 in Durham

DATE: 14 May 2020

Assembly Notes

1. For years disabled students have been asking for flexibility in teaching and assessment formats, particularly exams.
2. The Covid-19 outbreak has proven that requests repeatedly denied by Universities to disabled students are possible and can be implemented quickly when Universities chose to.
3. In April 2020 Durham Students' Union submitted a policy to NUS Liberation conference 2020 entitled "Finding a Silver Lining: carrying forward improvements to accessibility post Covid-19" attached as Appendix 1.

Assembly Believes

1. If the flexibility in teaching and assessment methods continues post Covid-19 it will benefit many disabled students.
2. Durham University should offer this flexibility to students post Covid-19.

Assembly Resolves

1. To require the SU Officer to team to work with the Durham University to ensure this flexibility in teaching and assessment continues post Covid-19 as outlined in the NUS policy (Appendix 1).

Appendix 1

Finding a Silver Lining: carrying forward improvements to accessibility post Covid-19

Submitted by: Durham Students' Union

Summary of issue

All students should receive an education which is fully and truly accessible and offers an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of identity. For many years, liberation activists have campaigned for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to make changes in order to achieve this and for many years, they have been told that such changes are not possible. However, the Covid-19 outbreak has clearly shown that not only are such changes possible, but HEIs are capable of implementing inclusive methods such as online recorded teaching and take-home exams both quickly and widely.

These teaching and assessment methods, if carried forwards beyond the pandemic, would make a substantial difference to the education of many students whose needs have traditionally not been prioritised by the education system. Specifically, this includes students with disabilities and students from other liberation groups, who experience disproportionately high rates of disability and mental ill-health in particular¹.

In addition to teaching and assessment methods, processes and policies regarding concessions and deferrals have also been adapted in response to the Covid-19 outbreak; another change which liberation activists have consistently campaigned for. Previously, to receive extensions, deferrals or special consideration, students have been expected to jump through hoops to demonstrate their needs, often by providing costly medical evidence and following invasive bureaucratic processes. At NUS National Conference 2020, student representatives from across the country passed Durham SU's policy on Parity in Healthcare, confirming the need for HEIs to review and alter their policies and procedures to become more streamlined, 'focusing on genuine necessity for medical evidence'². Now, HEIs have proven that this is possible, and we must ensure that this progress is not lost when HEIs eventually begin to review the changes made during Covid-19.

What could be the solution?

¹ Williams, Buck and Babalola (2020). *What are Health Inequalities?*. The Kings Fund. Available at: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/what-are-health-inequalities#long>

² Durham SU (2020). Policy passed at NUS National Conference 2020. Policy and voting figures available at: <https://conference.nusconnect.org.uk/policy>; <https://conference.nusconnect.org.uk/results/policy-and-report-voting-results>

In the months during the global Covid-19 outbreak, HEIs have shown that the changes so many activists have campaigned for in the past *are possible*, contrary to what they've so frequently been told. We cannot allow this progress to be lost. We believe that education must be fully and truly accessible to all, regardless of disability, mental illness or background, to ensure that everyone is given equal opportunity to succeed in our education system.

Together, we must lobby for HEIs to adopt accessible and inclusive teaching practices as standard – beyond the immediate circumstances of Covid-19 – and for these to be protected in policy. This means that all students will have access to recorded lectures and other online resources, allowing them to fully engage with their education.

HEIs must take responsibility for ensuring that all students have the necessary resources, space and time to effectively engage with their education. This means that all students who need it will have access to appropriate assistive technology, as well as suitable space to complete assessed work and additional time if required.

Students should be given the option to complete alternative assessments, such as take-home and online exams, whilst also recognising that all students will have unique, individual needs. This means that HEIs must listen to the experiences of students with disabilities or other individual needs and ensure that they are fully supported during assessment periods, in order for them to demonstrate their academic abilities as best as possible.

Concessions such as extensions and deferrals must be made more accessible to students without the need for costly medical evidence and bureaucratic processes. This means that students will be trusted by HEIs to request concessions when they need them, without having to share extensive personal details or 'proving' their need.

We now know that all of the above *are possible* across the sector. Though it's disappointing that HEIs have only made these changes now that they have had to, rather than to support students from liberation groups, we must now ensure that they are carried forwards, post Covid-19, in a step to make our higher education system more accessible to all.

TO: Assembly

FROM: Chahat Paruthi (on behalf of Academic Affairs Committee)

RE: Academic Support: SU Core Position

DATE: 14 May 2020

The belief and its justifications

Academic affairs committee believes that the level of academic support available across University is very variable. There are some fantastic examples of academic support from certain departments, where members of academic staff as well as professional services have gone above and beyond for students. However this is not the case for all. Some students, especially those pursuing joint and combined honours courses, feel that they have slipped through the cracks of a system that is largely reactive, not proactive. This was especially prevalent in students who declared a disability in the survey conducted.

The definition of a better future

All students receive a minimum standard of academic support, which secures their smooth transition between levels and provides a structure for students to check in with their studies themselves and raise any issues they may be having before they escalate into serious problems. In the same vein, all academics should feel able and supported to provide academic advising to the best of their abilities.

This takes several forms. The first, key, procedural change is that the University sets a standard for academic advising. This includes stipulating how often advisors should meet with students, what topics they can advise on, and knowledge of routine signposting options for services both in and outside of the department, such as work placement co-ordinators, mental health support and disability support. There also needs to be considerations put in place if an advisor leaves part-way through a student's degree.

Academic affairs also believes that a scheme to match up willing students from underrepresented groups with academics who self-identify within these groups may be an important step in providing a higher level of support for those who may struggle to see themselves actively and positively represented in Higher Education.

The barriers

There are obvious barriers; namely resources in the form of staff time and workload. It is understood that many individuals are severely hampered to deliver the service expected of them within the contracted time, so this would need to be considered by the University. Moreover, some may be performing roles akin to academic advising without having this explicitly mentioned in their contract. This poses an issue in that some may naturally see it as a lesser priority as it is not necessarily a duty they are contractually obliged to, but that they are expected to carry out in addition to their contracted role. However, Academic affairs believes that supporting students' educations well is a resource that the University should invest in, by making it a contractual obligation for those involved and making sure staff have the resources and time in their workload to fulfil their duties to the best of their ability.

It is also important to note that different students have different needs – one person's academic advising will look very different to another's. This is not to chastise those who

need extra support; more to make sure that everyone receives the appropriate level of support for their needs. As it looks different for every person, it can be hard to assure students that they have not “lost out” as someone else has received “more”, causing more harm and upset than intended. There would need to be assurances to students that the services are equally available to them, should they require it.

Putting in measures like requiring a certain level of support can look like a centralising approach, which is in direct conflict with Durham’s history of autonomous departments who structure themselves around the needs of their disciples, staff and students. However, the approach being tabled is a measure of standardisation, not centralisation. This means that each department needs to play their part in upholding a good standard of academic support driven by the University, not reporting to a central academic support mechanism that sits within the central University structures.

Belief about the change and the responsibilities

- Durham Students’ Union must work with the University to develop a standard for academic advising
- Durham Students’ Union should lobby the University for the introduction of a standard list of responsibilities for academic advisors
- Durham Students’ Union should lobby the University to develop and lead a training programme that is mandatory for all staff taking part in academic advising
- Durham Students’ Union must lobby the University for as many staff as possible involved in academic advising to take part in a mental health first aid course.
- Durham Students’ Union must work with the University to use existing networks to link up willing students with mentors that can help them succeed