
DURHAM \$U

DEMOCRACY REVIEW TENDER

PURPOSE:

What do Durham students believe the purpose of student democracy should be? How do they engage with each other? What do student communities mean to them and how do they want to participate in shaping them? How do they work to make Durham better and how do they want to do this? How would they rather access information, and how would they prefer to give feedback and discuss things that matter to them? How does all of this differ across different groups of students, and what are the barriers to participation for these different groups? We need your help and expertise to ask questions like this in the right way.

There's a lot we need to know about how our students engage and want to participate in making their student communities, their everyday lives and their university education better. We know students aren't all the same – there is no average student. Their experiences and preferences differ – and it's our responsibility to be inclusive to all of this and provide opportunities for participation that span these differences. To do this we need evidence and insight from across a broad range of the student body, to inform how we shape our structures for and with students, moving forward. That is the purpose of this work.

We anticipate this work to involve both methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative research on student perspectives, preferences and habits, undertaken between October and December 2020.

What we don't need you to find out:

There are lots of things that we don't need you to find out because our student community can tell us and shape it directly. These logistical things we can consider ourselves, such as how often do students want democratic meetings? How many people should sit on committees? How many people and who should get to vote on what decisions? Student activists and leaders with help us work these things out discursively – but the insight you'll help us get will be the fuel for those discussions.

PRINCIPLES:

This work should involve student stakeholders at all levels of the research, including oversight and scoping, and be transparent and accessible to the student body. It should seek to help us dismantle structural oppression within our own democracy, by identifying barriers to participation. As such, it must be built upon the inclusion of diverse student voices from across our community.

INTRODUCTION TO DURHAM SU:

Durham SU is a charity and the representative students' union for all 19,367 (2019-20 academic year) Durham University students.

Durham SU exists for a purpose: To be the champion of every Durham student. No matter what college or academic department our members are from, they can come together with others from across Durham. Students can meet people who share their interests, passions or problems through their students' union. We're interested in the things that matter to them. We stand up for their rights. We bring them together. We celebrate their success. We have a vision for our future. We're working to make sure

that students have the power and opportunity to transform their time at Durham and get the most out of it.

We exist as part of a vibrant community of student organisation in Durham, including Common Rooms, Durham Community Action (volunteering), Team Durham sports, Durham Student Theatre, Durham Student Music and more. We are owned by students, led by our five elected Student Officers, and our work is driven by hundreds of elected and appointed student volunteers.

SNAPSHOT. SOME OF WHAT WE DO IN NUMBERS:

- We have over 250 student groups, with over 12,000 students joining a group annually and over 20,000 total memberships. Our groups span from academic societies, to hobbies and games, culture and faith, and politics and causes.
- We have over 450 academic course representatives representing students at the course and department level across our 27 departments.
- Our student representatives sit on over 100 University formal decision-making committees, as well as on University council, the highest governing body in the institution.
- Our students Raise and Give group, DUCK, raises on average £190,000 per year.
- We host an average of 9,000 students at our annual Freshers' Fair induction event.
- We provide one-to-one advice for over 500 students annually through our Advice Service.
- We run two commercial venues and generate an annual income of £85,000, which is reinvested in student activities.
- We administer a minimum of four cross-campus elections, and almost 500 other student elections each year, with approximately 10,000 student votes cast, and around 900 student candidates putting themselves forward for roles.
- Five elected sabbatical Student Officers lead the Students' Union, and over 800 student volunteers and 40 student staff make all this happen, with the support of 27 professional staff.

SNAPSHOT. SOME OF THE WAYS WE MAKE THINGS BETTER WITH STUDENTS:

- Securing 24-hour library access for students
- Securing a 'no detriment' exam policy for students during COVID-9
- Securing funding for free student membership of academic societies for two years
- Securing funding for additional mental health workers in the counselling services and creation of mental health training for student leaders
- Pushing for and getting agreement for extra study spaces across the library and Dunelm House
- Securing pay and conditions improvements for postgraduates who teach
- Launching the Decolonise Durham Network and getting senior University commitment to its work

- Introducing and running welfare residential training for welfare reps in colleges, active bystander training for Freshers Reps in colleges and leadership effectiveness residential for Common Room Presidents
- Creating a student-landlord pledge to ensure good practice from landlords and Estate Agents during COVID-19
- Pressuring private accommodation blocks to issue compensation to students who had moved into incomplete bedrooms

CONTEXT:

Durham SU's democratic structures are governed by our governing documents – our Standing Orders and our Articles of Association. Over the many years since they were originally created they have been tweaked and added to by successive student assemblies (our student representative council) and student referenda (the voting mechanism by which our Articles of Association are changed), often making individual parts better and stronger. However, as a whole framework, this has rendered them gradually more inconsistent, and sometimes led to sections becoming incompatible with each other, with the things we have evidence students actually need or want, or with the legal obligations of the Students' Union. Last November, Durham SU's trustees and Durham's SU's student assembly held separate conversations about this, and both concluded that our democratic structures needed review and improvement to make them more accessible. As such work has been undertaken from January to scope and understand the scale and parameters for this work– you can find the report of that work [here](#).

However, before this work could pick up steam, our Officer and Trustee elections, held in February, brought student dissatisfaction and confusion about SU democratic structures into the spotlight. In light of this student dissatisfaction and interest in making the rules better and more transparent, Durham SU reiterated and expanded our commitment to undertaking a democracy review. We now anticipate this being a deeper and further-reaching process than we had initially anticipated, and fundamental to rebuilding trust and partnership with the student body. There are many democratic student bodies in Durham shaping democratic culture, but the level of scrutiny and challenge we face is much higher – we need to understand but not duplicate the culture that drives this.

The need to ensure broad student views shape this work has been highlighted consistently by our student members and is particularly emphasised by the experience of both students of colour and international students through our elections, and during the recent Black Lives Matter movement. Their experiences have highlighted that structures across Durham University perpetuate barriers to participation and discrimination for students from minority groups. We by no means think Durham SU is an exception to this, but we hope to be a role-model in our willingness to understand and address it.

We know, and are deeply concerned, that election rules and campaigns based on democratic principles were weaponised as vehicles for racism in our most recent cross-campus elections. Candidates were harassed, vilified and bullied in this election more than ever before – which coincided with more students of colour and

international students running for election than ever before. Our top priority is to understand the structural barriers to inclusivity and participation in our democracy which have, in the past, limited the power of these students to influence our democratic structures and rules.

This research will inform the co-creation by students and the Students' Union of new democratic structures, and the removal of old ones that aren't fit for purpose. It will also inform the way we relate to and engage with our student members across the organisation. We believe this work will lead to fundamental changes in how we and our members work in partnership and will be the basis for how we see ourselves moving forward.

DELIVERABLES AND PROVISIONAL TIMELINE:

We are open to recommendations on deliverables and timelines to maximise insights, but the below is recommended based on Durham University Michaelmas term dates 5 October-11 December.

- Key stakeholder consultation and agreement of qualitative and quantitative methods with a small oversight panel of staff and students – by **10 October**
- Research conducted and data gathered, with one interim insights report/update and fortnightly updates of participant numbers etc. – by **1 December**
- Data analysis and final report, with at least two sessions presenting the insights to stakeholders – by **22 December**

REQUIREMENTS:

- Willingness to work with panel of a small group of student volunteers as key stakeholders in the oversight of the research
- Willing to work with a student researcher employed by Durham Students' Union to assist in the facilitation of focus groups
- Willingness to share in depth breakdown of research results with Durham SU as well as provide top level analysis
- Commitment to championing diversity and inclusion in your work
- All tenders will be considered, but we anticipate this work to be delivered for good value (including student incentives) for no more than £7,000. Tenders that do not include on site work in Durham will be considered, but a corresponding cost saving is anticipated.

RESPONDING TO TENDER:

YOUR TENDER DOCUMENT SHOULD INCLUDE:

- Your ideas on methodology and approach (including timeline) to undertaking this work, including how you will learn about and build an understanding of the context
- How you will communicate and update key stakeholders on the project's progress
- How you will help Durham SU ensure this work is transparent and communicated to students
- Your approach to recruiting participants in the research and ensuring they come from diverse groups
- Examples and case studies of your previous work developing, conducting and analysing market research or similar on a comparable scale, including references
- Evidence of your commitment to diversity and inclusion in how you work
- A clear breakdown of the cost of delivery
- What you need from us – the support, resource and information you think you'll need to do this work
- A summary of up to 750 words of your approach to this work that can be shared with students during the application process.
- Any conflicts of interest you might have regarding working with Durham SU

CONTACT AND TENDER PROCESS:

Applications for tender will close on Friday 4 September.

A staff and student panel will shortlist over a period of two to three weeks, with the aim of inviting up to three applicants to present to us via Zoom. We will contact you the week of 14 September with presentations the week of 14 September.

If you have any questions or queries, please contact Becca Henderson rebecca.henderson@durham.ac.uk.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

[About Durham SU](#)

[Annual report \(18/19\)](#)

[Strategy](#)

[Miragold report](#)

[Statement from Durham SU Assembly](#)

[2017 student insights research](#)